

Geopolitical Insights into South Asia



GÜNEY ASYA STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
SOUTH ASIA STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTER

GEOPOLITICAL INSIGHTS INTO SOUTH ASIA





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FOREWORD

The world's political geography is defined based on the distribution of natural, human, political, and economic phenomena, as well as universal values and interstate relations. South Asia, geographically bounded by the Indian Ocean to the south and the Himalayas and Karakoram to the north is a region in the southern part of the Asian continent defined in both geographical and ethnocultural terms. In the past, it was referred to in geographical literature as the "Subcontinent/Indian Subcontinent," but the term "South Asia" has become more commonly used in the last century.

South Asia spans approximately 5.2 million square kilometers, covering 3.5% of the world's land area and 11.71% of Asia's total landmass. With a population of nearly 2 billion—comprising roughly a quarter of the global population—it is the world's most populous and densely populated geographic region. The countries that make up South Asia include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

The purpose of this book is to analyze the geopolitical position and the national and international political significance of the

South Asian region, which includes friendly and brotherly nations, and to explore the “strengths and weaknesses” of the region’s countries in societal, ethnic, religious, cultural, and economic areas. The book also aims to examine the potential sources between South Asian countries and Türkiye, identify strong partnerships, and raise regional and global awareness. We have conducted an in-depth study to produce valuable work for political authorities, bureaucrats, academics, and intellectuals, thus appealing to all segments of society.

It is essential to update and increase awareness regarding the geopolitical constants and variables of a region where a nation or a group of nations resides, taking into account the experiences of societal “benefits and harms.” In order to present a methodological study that examines and evaluates the influence of regional and global power centers, determines objectives, and outlines the conditions and stages for achieving these objectives, we have collaborated with authors, including nationals of the region and Türkiye, to compile Geopolitical Insights into South Asia under the following main topics:

- Regional Economic Corridors
- Regional Cooperation Organizations
- Regional Environmental Problems
- Regional Social and Cultural Movements

We hope this book will broaden the readers’ perspectives on the region’s importance. In today’s critical geopolitical landscape, where space and discourse have become politicized beyond imagination and hegemonic powers have evolved into new global struggles, reassessing the region within the context of Türkiye and South Asia will benefit societies.

As the South Asia Strategic Research Center (GASAM), our priority is to closely follow global and regional developments, enhance socio-cultural, economic, and political relations between Türkiye and South Asian countries, and contribute to regional and global development, peace, and stability. We extend our gratitude to all individuals and institutions that have provided material and moral support in bringing this work to life.

Cemal Demir
GASAM President

REGIONAL ECONOMIC CORRIDORS

CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC)

Dr. Emrah Kaya

Introduction

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a transportation, logistics, port, and energy-based project between China and Pakistan. In July 2013, during Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to China, various agreements were signed between the parties on energy, trade, and communication. The agreements also included the construction of a corridor between western China, also known as East Turkestan, and Pakistan. In April 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Islamabad and fifty-one agreements, including CPEC, were signed between the two countries (Ali, 2020: 101).

CPEC, one of the main lines of the Belt-Road Project, allows China to reach the Indian Ocean, Oman Sea, Persian Gulf, Development Road, Red Sea, Gulf countries, and Africa via Pakistan. CPEC does not only amount to a route for China but also

to new investments for Pakistan. It is also a tool for global and regional competition, eliminating risks, reducing costs, and creating influence. Therefore, it is crucial to examine CPEC from a geopolitical viewpoint along with its economic dimension. This study is an elaboration on CPEC, evaluating the project in different dimensions.

Overview of CPEC and Gwadar Port

CPEC is a project of approximately 3000 km, reaching first from the Chinese city of Kashgar to the Pakistan border and then to Gwadar Port. The project will include the construction of highways, railways, fiber optic networks, and energy pipelines. In addition, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), dry ports and various energy projects will be implemented. This includes the construction and development of Gwadar Port. Initially planned to be a \$46 billion project, the cost of CPEC was increased to \$62 billion in 2017 (McCartney, 2022: 180-181). It is expected to cost 75 billion dollars today and will exceed this amount when private-sector investments are taken into account (Zhao and Munadi, 2023: 495). Energy, infrastructure, and economic zones are key topics within CPEC (Ali, 2020: 101-104). 4% of the project's budget was allocated for Gwadar Port, 21% for railways and roads, and 71% for the energy sector (McCartney, 2022: 181).

China and Pakistan approved the "Long-Term Plan for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017-2030)" to coordinate relations within the framework of CPEC. It was emphasized that the plan was in line with Pakistan Vision 2025, and the project was divided into three phases. Short-term projects were to be considered up to 2020, medium-term projects up to 2025, and long-term projects up to 2030 (CPEC Secretariat Office, 2017: 2). The main goal of CPEC is to provide China in this process with access to the seas via a different route. The incidents and tensions around its borders and territorial waters are pushing China towards this project. In this respect, the main structure that will provide China with access to the sea is the Gwadar Port. The port is attributed to having strategic importance in the project. China's interest in Gwadar began before 2015. In February 2014, the parties announced that they would focus on the construction of the port (Deng and Xiang, 2021: 13). In the first stage of the plan, the port's logistics infrastruc-

ture was strengthened, its capacity was increased, and a free trade zone was established. In the second stage, the port-adjacent industry is being developed, and a new city is being built around the port. In the third stage, a global supply chain system will be established within the scope of CPEC, and the least costly, shortest, time-consuming and most efficient logistics service will be provided during the trade of a product (Deng and Xiang, 2021: 16-19). Meanwhile, Gwadar will be managed by Hong Kong-based China Overseas Port Holding Corporation for 40 years (Khetran, 2018: 44).

According to the plan, CPEC will not be used only for one-way trade flow. Minerals, energy resources and raw materials from regions with rich underground resources, such as Africa and the Gulf countries, will be transferred to Pakistan and China via CPEC. China will also export its domestic products via this line. At this point, it can be said that CPEC will operate in both directions. For this purpose, it is planned to establish oil/petrochemical and LNG/LPG terminals, refineries, a mineral handling terminal, an ore preparation zone, a steel factory, a chemical processing zone, and Gwadar Port Maritime Institute (GPMI) in Gwadar. Also, investments in sectors such as steel production, cement factory, automobile assembly, shipyard, and textile factory are considered to provide significant advantages in order for the region to become a center for production and export (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, n.d.).

Gwadar is at the center of infrastructure investments within the scope of CPEC. Although China acts based on energy interests, Gwadar is considered the most critical center that will enable it to reach the Persian Gulf, Africa, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean. CPEC and Gwadar are of great importance in reducing Beijing's need for risky and long-distance regions such as the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. Therefore, the construction and development of Gwadar is an essential project for China. Pakistan also plans to make Gwadar an important center with the investments made and generate economic income. While China aims to reduce costs and risks by reaching Africa and the Persian Gulf, Pakistan aims to strengthen its economy, infrastructure, and authority in problematic regions such as Balochistan through investments made in the region.

China's CPEC Policy

One of China's most important tools in the process of transforming into a global power is the Belt-Road Project. In this process, China acts with the motivation of gains, establishing influence and neutralizing potential sources of threat. Thanks to the project, China has been able to develop political, economic and social relations with various countries. China wants to achieve many goals with CPEC. In this respect, it is a project in which China's political, economic and security-based interests and goals are intertwined.

While China is one of the rising centers of Asia, it has various problematic relations with India and Japan on the continent. In the mean time, with the influence of the US and Australia, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) was formed in the region. It can be argued that this formation is against China (Jaffery and Pervez, 2024) and has containment motives (Sarkar, 2020: 122). China appears to have adopted three strategies at this point. First, it is trying to create an alternative route with CPEC because, surrounded by the sea to its south, China may face a major obstacle in trade and energy supply processes. Today, 90% to 95% of world trade takes place through the seas. China also uses the seas intensively and 80% of its oil needs pass through the Strait of Malacca. This is a significant risk leading to the Malacca Dilemma (Zhao and Munadi, 2023: 492). China plans to carry out some of its trade and energy supply through CPEC in order to reduce its geopolitical dependence on Southeast Asia and eliminate risks. (McCartney, 2021: 363).

Second, China would not want to leave Southeast Asia, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean to the control of its rivals, considering QUAD. At this point, China aims to build influence within the scope of its interests and security on the route that proceeds from its own coasts through the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. In the maritime dimension of the Belt-Road Project, China employs the String of Pearls Strategy and puts efforts into building or taking control of ports in countries it deems important by making agreements with its administrations. In this setting, it is possible to say that Gwadar is of critical importance. China, in this way, can control the trade line, increase its military activities and compete more strongly with its rivals by connecting the lines within the String (McCartney, 2022: 181).

Thirdly, while China is establishing closer ties with Pakistan, it is trying to contain India, one of its most important rivals in the region. (Rehman, 2009). Having pursued this policy for a long time, Beijing gains significantly from the relations it has developed with Islamabad in particular. The relations between the parties evolved multidimensionally, including nuclear cooperation, with the primary objective of counterbalancing New Delhi's influence in the region (Rehman, 2009: 117). Today, it can be said that China is trying to impede and balance India, a rising power, by both supporting Pakistan economically and increasing its influence in Pakistan with CPEC. China's trade via Gwadar implicates various processes regarding the security of the region. For instance, the security of Gwadar and the ships in the region are noteworthy. China aims to maintain its maritime influence and ensure maritime security against its rivals, such as the US and India, including the security of the corridors. One of China's objectives in this process is acquisitions in critical regions such as Gwadar as per its "active defense" strategy (Mihr and Weiffen, 2022: 248). How this could unfold is hidden in the puzzle that China invests in a fragile economy like Pakistan. Because, as evident in the example of Sri Lanka, if Pakistan cannot pay its loans, China will be able to seize Gwadar Port, assets, and lands. On the other hand, Pakistan's expectation is that it will not have any problems with repayment as a result of the increase in the country's income and continued growth with the contribution of CPEC (Husain, 2018: 7-8). However, the transfer of Gwadar's control to China means an important gain in China's String of Pearls Strategy.

In consideration of security, terrorist organizations in Pakistan are notorious for their targeting of Chinese investments. However, Pakistan is criticized for not having been successful in preventing such attacks. For this reason, Beijing may increase its pressure on Islamabad and force Pakistan to cooperate and sign agreements on military issues. Such a situation brings with it the possibility of China obtaining various military bases and ports in Pakistan. Similar to the case of Djibouti, China may use the security of its investments as an argument to increase its military presence in different countries (Younus, 2023).

China's perspective on CPEC is also shaped by the framework in which economy and geopolitics are intertwined. In case a product produced in Urumqi, the capital of East Turkestan, known as the Xinjiang-Uyghur

Autonomous Region, is marketed to the world, the distance between this city and China's eastern ports is approximately 4,500 km. The product then needs to cross risky areas such as the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. This increases duration, costs, and risks. In contrast, the distance between Urumqi and Gwadar is approximately 2,400 km (China Overseas Ports Holding Company Pakistan, n.d.). Moreover, a product marketed to the world via Gwadar will not need to pass through risky areas and travel a long distance. This means lower costs and a shorter duration needed to trade for China (Sun, 2010/2011: 44).

China is also trying to use CPEC as a tool of influence against the Uyghur Turks. Governed by an authoritarian attitude, China aims to assimilate the Uyghurs. Some of the Uyghurs organizing against China join radical groups. Using these radical groups as an excuse, China shapes its policy towards the Uyghurs and various radical groups by influencing Pakistan with economic investments. China follows policies similar to its Pakistani policy in Turkestan and Middle East countries as well (McCartney, 2021: 363-364).

Pakistan's CPEC Policy

Despite being one of the medium-sized South Asian countries, Pakistan is experiencing economic problems, and its infrastructure is weak in many aspects. According to the World Bank (WB), Pakistan has a population of 240 million, and its gross domestic product (GDP) is around 338 billion dollars. The national income per capita is 1,400 dollars, and the inflation rate in the country is 30% (The World Bank, 2023). While this constitutes a significant problem, the Islamabad administration endeavors to develop projects and relations that will enable it to overcome the country's economic, energy, transportation, communication, and infrastructure problems. It is expected that the CPEC worth 62 billion dollars will give Pakistan a breath of fresh air and also create employment for 2 million people. Moreover, it is anticipated that in addition to the advantages that the CPEC will provide to Pakistan in terms of transportation, it will also transform the country into a connection and trade center of the region, encompassing Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkestan (Ali, 2020: 102; McCartney, 2022: 181). Landlocked Turkestan countries can especially reach the seas via Pakistan through projects such as the Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor.

Pakistan is geopolitically stuck between Iran and India. It has severed relations with India and is in competition with Iran. India's increasing influence in global politics and economy disturbs Pakistan. In such a reality, the CPEC provides Pakistan with the opportunity to compete with the economically rising India. In addition, China is seen as a balancing actor in the Indian Ocean in military terms. As for Iran, it is known that Islamabad and Tehran blame each other for terrorist threats in the region. The agreement reached with China through CPEC and the development of Gwadar fueled the competition with Iran. While Pakistan is putting efforts into transforming Gwadar as a center in the region, Iran aims to position Chabahar, 70 km away from Gwadar, as another center. Moreover, in return for the cooperation established between Pakistan and China, Iran and India came to an agreement on Chabahar (Khetran, 2018: 44). In this environment, while China and Pakistan are developing strong relations, its two rivals that cooperate among themselves are of strategic importance to Pakistan.

Pakistan attaches great importance to CPEC today, and this attitude persists despite government changes. However, Pakistan's major concern is the possibility that CPEC will be terrorized and this will negatively affect relations with China. After all, in the period before CPEC, when different groups attacked Chinese companies, investors and workers in Pakistan, China withdrew from some Pakistani regions and openly requested the Islamabad administration to provide security. During this period, China reduced its military support to Pakistan on the grounds that its interests were not guaranteed. While this was a significant success for terrorist organizations, it was a great loss for Islamabad that China withdrew its support in a region where it had an enemy like India. Unwilling to see its relations with China deteriorate due to terrorist attacks, Pakistan created special units within its security forces to protect CPEC and Chinese investments. In addition, the parties cooperate through the army, navy, paramilitary forces and private military companies and draft a coordinated security strategy (Basit, 2018).

Criticism and Concerns Regarding CPEC

Although CPEC is a project that accommodates significant opportunities for China and Pakistan, it has brought considerable criticism and

debates. First of all, both the regions on the CPEC route and Gwadar's infrastructure and transportation system are in inadequate condition. The infrastructure issue can lead to increased costs and a delay in the process, which can cause serious risks. Although a global supply chain is planned to be established in Gwadar later, the public service in the region is deemed to be inadequate. It is stated that the expected efficiency from customs clearance and transportation services cannot be obtained because the region is not properly supervised and governed (Deng and Xiang, 2021: 19).

Evident from an examination of the CPEC route is that it actually passes through very problematic regions. For example, the fact that a portion of CPEC passes through Kashmir disturbed India. Moreover, the prospect that China might be militarily present both on the CPEC line and in Gwadar is a significant source of concern for India (Collin, 2019: 15-16). The terrorism threat is also one of the major problems in the CPEC line. Organizations that conduct religious and ethnic-separatist attacks in the region do not want Pakistan to become stronger and more stable. For this reason, they are trying to present Pakistan with an image of an unsafe country by targeting various projects, thus ensuring that investors withdraw. This renders CPEC as a target (Khan and Ahmed, 2024; Fayyaz and Malik, 2019: 436).

CPEC is basically shaped within the framework of the interests of two states. However, various protests organized by the Pakistani people against CPEC and the investments made in Gwadar are notorious. Protesters state that the region was damaged during the project and construction process. In addition, the overfishing of Chinese fishermen and the obstruction of local fishermen in the region for the security of Gwadar draw reactions. There is also increasing criticism that the Chinese benefit more than the Pakistanis and the local people from the investments made in Gwadar, the new city and various structures established (Demir, 2022: 107). From this point of view, CPEC appears to serve the Chinese and Pakistani elite, not to benefit the local people and to have a neo-colonialist approach. For this reason, public criticism against CPEC is on the rise in Pakistan (Khan and Ahmed, 2024).

Conclusion

CPEC is a project that has the capacity to influence regional and global

dynamics beyond the relationship between the two states because, after the implementation of CPEC, China will be less dependent on risky and costly areas such as the Strait of Malacca. It will be able to pursue a more confident policy against its rivals in the face of the increasing tension in the region, as, in this process, it secures an alternative corridor and trade route. In addition, China will have largely dismantled the containment policy pursued against it with formations such as QUAD. China will also gain a tremendous geopolitical advantage against its neighbor India because, as a result of the relations it has established with Pakistan, the Beijing-Islamabad alliance also contains India and restricts its maneuvering capability. Pakistan will also gain through CPEC, primarily in economic terms but also politically and security-wise. However, the fact that China is the principal executive and investor of CPEC limits Pakistan's influence and expectations in the project.

In addition to the positive expectations it creates in China and Pakistan, CPEC also brings with it various question marks. One of these question marks is whether Pakistan has been lured into a debt trap by China. Although both parties seem to be contented with the relations that have been established today, it is underlined that if Pakistan cannot pay the loans in the future, it may share Sri Lanka's fate; in other words, China may seize the Gwadar Port. While this situation nurtures prejudice against China, a possible development in this line may shape the relations of the two friendly countries in a very different way. On the other hand, it is stated that in case various security threats within Pakistan harm CPEC and the bilateral relations between Pakistan and China, the project costs may increase, the project may be delayed, and Pakistan may be subject to more pressure from China and fall under the military and security influence of this country.

Gwadar is a gateway for CPEC to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and Africa. It will also potentially have access to the Development Path. Therefore, if CPEC is integrated with the Development Path, a strong relationship can be established between Türkiye, China, Pakistan and Iraq. In this case, Türkiye's geopolitical importance and gains will increase. However, it is also likely that CPEC will reduce the potential of the Middle Corridor. In case China does not steer towards the Development Path after CPEC and tries to reach Europe via the Red Sea, Türkiye's geopolitical significance may decrease and the impor-

tance of the Turkestan-Caspian Sea-Caucasus route may also be damaged. However, considering that China does not want to be dependent on a single corridor and prefers alternative corridors, it can be predicted that China will continue to actively use both the Middle Corridor, the Development Path and the Red Sea. This amounts to a significant advantage for Türkiye.

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INDIA-MIDDLE EAST-EUROPE ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (IMEC)

Dr. Sayyad Sadri Alibabalu

Introduction

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is a strategic project that aims to strengthen trade, energy, and infrastructure connections between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. This initiative was announced at the G20 Summit in India on September 9, 2023, with the sponsorships of the United States, India, Saudi Arabia, and the European Union. IMEC's goal is to integrate maritime and railway infrastructures and diversify trade routes by establishing a seamless transportation link from India to Europe (IISS, 2023). The project covers two main lines: the Eastern Corridor will connect India to the Middle East, and the Northern Corridor will accelerate the transportation of goods from the Gulf to Europe. Beyond transportation, IMEC aims to establish a multifaceted infrastructure, including energy pipelines and digital connections.

The planning of clean energy-carrying pipelines, in particular, renders IMEC an environmentally friendly initiative (Eurasia Review, 2023).

IMEC's impact on global trade could be significant. The project is presented as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aims to balance the BRI's influence in the Middle East (ERF, 2023). According to projections, goods transported via IMEC will reach their destination 40% faster than they do via the Suez Canal route. This is expected to both reduce costs and prevent disruptions in global supply chains (Eurasia Review, 2023; IISS, 2023). This project offers a strategic opportunity for participating countries. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are contributing to the project with energy and infrastructure investments. These countries plan to use IMEC as a development tool within the framework of their economic diversification strategies (ERF, 2023). In addition, India's role in the project reinforces the country's increasing importance in global supply chains.

However, the diplomatic and logistical challenges that the project will face should also be considered. The differences in infrastructure standards on the routes through which IMEC will pass may lead to coordination problems in transportation processes (IISS, 2023). In addition, political tensions between the participating countries may threaten the sustainability of the corridor. It is also noteworthy that Türkiye is not included in IMEC. In response to this initiative, Türkiye has developed the Iraq Development Route project. Thus, it is expected that the competition between IMEC and alternative projects may change the trade balance in the Middle East (Eurasia Review, 2023). These dynamics will play an important role in determining the future success or failure of IMEC. The project is a multifaceted initiative that generally draws attention with both its economic and geopolitical dimensions, and its implementation depends on the integration of infrastructures and political cooperation. At the same time, the project offers a strategic opportunity to achieve global goals such as energy security, reducing carbon emissions, and diversifying trade routes. However, it is vital for IMEC to be successful that cooperation and political will of the participating countries are ensured.

Geopolitical Impacts of the Corridor

The geopolitical dimensions of the project are crucial for the Gulf countries, which are trying to adapt to a multipolar world. While these actors are involved in organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, they also maintain close relations with the West through projects like IMEC. Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia and the UAE economically cooperate with China's Belt and Road Initiative, their efforts to maintain a balance with the US through IMEC underline their increasing independence and strategic importance in the new world order. The US support for IMEC indicates its desire to create an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative and to strengthen its relations with its allies in the Middle East. However, the Gulf countries do not share this American strategic perspective; instead, they pursue multifaceted foreign policies geared towards developing relations with both the West and the East simultaneously. This balancing policy will further strengthen the Gulf's position among global powers. IMEC will also deliver India as an alternative to China's influence in the region by further strengthening its relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. India can expand its economic ties with the region through IMEC and acquire a strategic advantage over China and Pakistan. Consequently, IMEC is not just a commercial project but also a multi-dimensional initiative with the potential to change regional and global balances (Cafiero, 2023).

The project is a complementary effort by the West and its supporters to counter China's influence and convert their infrastructure initiatives into more concrete programs. The aim of this project is to strengthen the connection along the old Spice Route from India to Europe via the Persian Gulf. This is useful in the US competition with China and its goal of normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Considering the experience of Russia's war against Ukraine, this project will help Europe improve its economic and energy security and strengthen its relations with the Global South. The project also aids the Gulf countries in their aim to act as a bridge between the East and the West by connecting their energy markets to Europe. Therefore, the project will help India play a more significant role in global production chains and break Beijing's blockade (Rizzi, 2024). It is evident that this policy aims to isolate the two main power bases in the Middle East, namely Iran and

Türkiye, and because India objects to the Pakistan route and the US to Iran route, the project has been welcomed by the West. If the project progresses as planned, it will deeply integrate the Gulf countries and Israel with the West within a single system, especially after the war in Gaza that began on October 7, 2023.

India-China Rivalry

The ongoing tensions between India and China significantly shape the geopolitical dynamics revolving around IMEC. The relations between the two countries have become strained due to border disputes, and this rivalry is further sharpening their struggle for influence in South Asia and the Himalayas. While New Delhi is trying to balance China's growing influence in the region through IMEC, it is also strengthening its ties with significant Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE. India's participation in this project is considered a strategic move in terms of both regional and global competition. It is also expected that IMEC will provide India with a strategic advantage vis-à-vis China and Pakistan. Since the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through the disputed Pakistani territory of Kashmir, India considers IMEC an opportunity to increase its economic integration with the West. This corridor allows India to establish closer economic ties with the West by bypassing Pakistan, and thus, it might strengthen India's position in its competition with China (Cafiero, 2023).

The emergence of IMEC could also accelerate normalization processes between Israel and Arab countries in the Middle East. The improving relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel could further expand the economic dimension of this corridor, but it seems unlikely that Saudi Arabia will break its deep ties with China and adopt a pro-Western position. The Gulf countries are pursuing a strategy aimed at establishing balanced relations with both the West and the East in the multipolar world order.

Pakistan

The reasons and consequences of excluding Pakistan are worthy of note. IMEC is a major initiative that aims to connect India with the Mid-

dle East and Europe economically and to develop cooperation in trade, energy, and transportation among many countries. Pakistan's exclusion from this project is a reflection of its deep-seated geopolitical conflicts with India. Unresolved issues between India and Pakistan, especially the Kashmir issue, make economic cooperation between the two countries difficult (Rajagopalan, 2023). India's major role in IMEC is to exclude Pakistan from the project. Given the political tensions between the two countries, it is unlikely that they will come together in such a major economic initiative.

In addition, Pakistan's strong economic relations with China are also among the important reasons for not joining IMEC. The CPEC project is one of the most important pillars of the Belt and Road Initiative and is of great strategic importance to Pakistan. CPEC is a key link in China's energy and trade routes and enables access to the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia via the Gwadar Port (Small, 2015). This has led Pakistan to stand apart from IMEC since IMEC is being developed by the West and India as an alternative to China's BRI initiative (Sohail, 2024).

IMEC's goal of restructuring energy and trade routes targets directly connecting India to the Middle East and Europe, bypassing Pakistan. This could weaken Pakistan's strategic position in regional energy and trade routes. The fact that IMEC includes major land and maritime trade routes through South Asia may lead to Pakistan's diminishing influence on them. However, Pakistan's strategic partnership with China, especially the projects under CPEC, is part of the country's efforts to compensate for these potential impacts. In response, Pakistan is trying to strengthen its own geopolitical strategy by diversifying its trade routes and access to energy resources (Cafiero, 2023).

Apart from its impact on Pakistan's relations with India and the West, its exclusion from IMEC deepens its dependence on China. While IMEC creates a great economic opportunity for India, Pakistan prefers to develop its own alternatives to this project by deepening its strategic relations with China (Small, 2015). China is strengthening its economic ties with Pakistan, and by expanding CPEC, it aims to balance the geopolitical advantages that India will gain through IMEC. Thus, Pakistan will continue to be committed to China's Belt and Road Initiative in order to balance India's regional influence (Rajagopalan, 2023).

Regional Conflicts and Their Impact on the Project

The war in Gaza and its consequences sidetracked IMEC plans. Thus, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong support for Israel and his statements declaring Hamas as terrorists reveal the importance of developments related to IMEC for India. India openly supports Israel. On the other hand, despite the fact that China usually follows a more neutral policy in such international conflicts, it has, this time, taken a closer stance towards Hamas and the Palestinian people both in the official platforms and through its media. This approach can also be regarded as a strategy to strengthen the BRI, which is a rival to IMEC, and to deal a blow to this economic corridor led by India (Alavi, 2023). Accordingly, the future of IMEC remains uncertain as long as the unclear prospects of Palestine and the Middle Eastern wars persist (Basak and Soltanieh, 2023; Korkmaz, 2023).

Egypt also feels inconvenienced by this project because it considers IMEC a rival to the Suez Canal. In case IMEC becomes a successful project, it will weaken the strategic importance of this canal. In addition, Egypt controls the Rafah border crossing, one of the vital connections to Gaza. Behind Israel's attacks on this region lies Egypt's distant attitude towards IMEC and the idea that it may be reluctant to completely close the Rafah crossing in the event of a possible blockade on Gaza (Alavi, 2023). Therefore, it is ascertained that Israel's all-out war on Gaza aims not only to eliminate Hamas but also to ensure the prospective security of these corridors.

The Project's Impacts on Türkiye

Apparently, Türkiye was not included in this project intentionally because India does not approve of Türkiye's Pakistan policy, and Türkiye's disagreements with the West, especially with Greece, led Western countries to ignore Türkiye in this project. Türkiye's exclusion from this project proves that the project is, in fact, a product of geopolitical competition. The statement by President Erdoğan, "There can be no corridor without Türkiye. The most suitable line for traffic from East to West has to pass through Türkiye" (Anadolu Ajansı, 2023), actually shows that Türkiye has a very positive view on this project. Türkiye's exclusion from the project has considerable impacts on the country.

From an economic perspective, Türkiye's exclusion from IMEC constrains the country's integration with a large global supply chain and its opportunity to become an important transit center in terms of trade in a rapidly globalizing world (Bagir, 2024). On the other hand, Türkiye's regional rivals, such as Greece, Israel, and Italy, will gain advantages in trade and transportation infrastructures by taking part in the corridor and managing to reduce Türkiye's regional influence. Türkiye could offer a second route to the project, which would include Pakistan and Iran and pass through Türkiye. In the event that this is realized, it could be a major geopolitical success for Türkiye because by participating in this project, Türkiye would both benefit economically and make a significant contribution to regional peace by connecting Pakistan and India with a corridor.

Conclusion

IMEC stands out as an economic corridor with the potential to transform global trade and energy transport lines. This project aims to provide a strong alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) against the backdrop of India and China's competition. It also aims to create a new trade network connecting South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The most important issue featured in the project is that all of the actors who do not accord with the West are excluded from this initiative.

IMEC also stands out as an economic corridor extending from India to Europe, intending to reinforce India's efforts to increase its economic and diplomatic leverage. This project aims to provide a strong alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) against the backdrop of India and China's competition. It also aims to create a new trade network connecting South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The project also aims to offer a solution to India's geopolitical concerns arising from border issues and competition with China and Pakistan. In this context, India plans to gain both regional and global competitive advantage through the project and increase the major powers' support in this competition. However, unexpected conflicts, such as the recent developments in Gaza, threaten the viability of IMEC. Tensions, especially between Israel and the Arab world, could threaten the security of Haifa Port and question the most important advantage of this corridor, that is,

the security factor. For IMEC to be successful in the long term, stable relations and peaceful solutions are required between countries of the region. No matter that the corridor promises economic gains for many countries, the current conflicts and political uncertainties in the Middle East render the future of IMEC uncertain.

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TURKMENISTAN-AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN-INDIA GAS PIPELINE (TAPI)

Dr. Emrah Kaya

Introduction

TAPI is a natural gas energy pipeline project involving Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. It was named using the English acronyms of the participating countries. The project was proposed in the 1990s with the scope of transferring Turkmen gas to Afghanistan and Pakistan, with India joining also later in 2008. Bringing together regionally competing actors at the same table, TAPI is also known as the Peace Pipeline as well as the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (Strand et al., 2010: 11).

TAPI is a project that involves various opportunities and risks due to the region in which it is located. Although it is evident that the project will provide significant advantages and benefits to the parties, the instabilities and conflict risks in the region constantly raise the issue of the project's feasibility. The

construction process re-started after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. In this study, an examination of TAPI will be provided, and the risks and opportunities it presents to the region will be evaluated. The ongoing geopolitical competition in the region positions TAPI as one of the issues warranting examination.

An Overview of TAPI and the Countries' Policies

TAP is 1,814 km long and was designed to transport 33 billion cubic meters of Turkmen natural gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India for 30 years. TAPI's planned pipeline will start from the Galkynysh gas field in the Merv region of Turkmenistan, reaching the Afghanistan border after a 214 km route in Turkmenistan. A 774 km pipeline will be built parallel to the Kandahar and Herat highways in Afghanistan, and the pipeline will reach the Pakistan border. Pakistan will extend the 826 km line through the cities of Quetta and Multan to Fazilka on the Indian border (Hydrocarbons Technology, n.d.).

The TAPI Pipeline Company (TPCL) consortium was established in November 2014 to implement the project. The shares in TPCL were divided into 85% Turkmenistan, 5% Afghanistan, 5% Pakistan and 5% India. Turkmengaz is the main contractor for the project, and the project cost is approximately \$10 billion. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) also supports the project. Turkmenistan received a \$700 million loan from the Islamic Development Bank under TAPI in 2017, while other countries made an initial investment of \$200 million. Afghanistan will receive approximately 5.11 billion cubic meters of gas under the project. In addition, India and Pakistan will pay \$400 million as a transition fee to the Kabul administration. The remaining 28 billion cubic meters of gas will be shared equally between Pakistan and India (Hydrocarbons Technology, n.d.).

Turkmenistan completed the construction of the pipeline section on its own territory in 2018. Seeking to implement the project as soon as possible, Turkmenistan completed the construction process smoothly thanks to its stability. However, the Afghanistan section of TAPI could not be constructed due to various security threats and conflicts. Construction of the Afghanistan section of TAPI began on September 11,

2024. Turkmenistan will build the section from its border to Herat. Later, the other sections of the line will be completed (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024).

TAPI is of great importance, primarily to Turkmenistan. In the 2000s, Turkmenistan and Russia signed agreements for energy and new pipeline construction. However, due to problems in bilateral relations, various explosions, the 2008 Economic Crisis, and excess gas, Russia reduced its gas purchases from this country. Thus, Ashgabat turned to new markets, such as the West and China (Lee, 2017: 7-8). However, Turkmenistan has become dependent on China for exports. It is likely that Turkmenistan will come under significant economic pressure in case of a dispute with China. For this reason, Turkmenistan puts efforts to secure itself in markets and is in need of new markets. South Asia, with its increasing importance in the world economy and geopolitics, stands out at this point.

Turkmenistan will economically benefit from exporting to the region. As is known, Turkmenistan has the fourth-largest natural gas reserves in the world, a potential adequate to become a regional energy center by exporting its energy resources to different countries. To do this, it needs to export energy to other Turkestan states, South Asia, and Europe, beyond China, Russia, and Iran. Turkmenistan is aware of this necessity, and the country is viewed as a competition area between actors such as Türkiye, the United States of America (USA), Europe, India, Pakistan, Iran, and China (Roy, 2011: 665). Today, the fact that countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan want to join TAPI increases Turkmenistan's potential to become a center.

Turkmenistan also considers its relations with South Asia within a security framework. Turkmenistan is uneasy with the fact that Afghanistan is a threat center in the region. The Taliban is seen as an unreliable actor due to its relations with terrorist organizations. In this environment, Turkmenistan aims to establish influence over Kabul and contribute to Afghanistan's stability by importing energy to the country and providing economic gains there through the TAPI project.

Afghanistan has long been exposed to foreign interventions, conflicts, and terrorist threats. This situation has put Kabul both economically and politically in a strained position and has also led to the exclusion of the country from various regional projects or has totally impeded the

implementation of the projects. Although Kabul administrations have shown willingness to participate in multiple projects at different times, it is not possible to say that these steps have been conclusive. TAPI is one of the concrete examples of this. TAPI was suspended for a long time, and its construction was not realized. For this reason, Afghanistan's problems became chronic, its geopolitical importance decreased, and it failed to benefit economically due to its exclusion from the projects or the projects remaining unrealized.

A new process was launched in September 2024 to implement TAPI in Afghanistan. The project will enable the Taliban to provide new employment and access a clean energy source. Considering that the country imports approximately 80% of its energy needs (Kanapiyanova, 2022: 238), TAPI can partially ameliorate the energy crisis in Afghanistan. On the other hand, within the scope of TAPI, Pakistan and India will pay Afghanistan an annual transit fee of 400 million dollars. This will provide a significant income to the Afghan economy (Anceschi, 2017: 411). In short, Afghanistan is trying to make use of its geopolitical position for a multi-dimensional gain.

Afghanistan plans to be a bridge between Turkestan and South Asia if TAPI is implemented. It is envisaged that the ties established with energy will be strengthened via energy transmission lines, railways, roads, and fiber cables. A project like TAPI is expected to yield benefits that will influence political attitudes and reinforce the perception of shared interests. In this context, the possibility that other expectations will materialize is also increasing (Yıldırım, 2023: 370).

Pakistan is one of the medium-sized countries of South Asia. Despite its large population, the country is struggling with various problems, including an energy crisis. Pakistan imports 40% of its energy needs, and 25% of its population has difficulty accessing energy (Arab News, 2022). Besides, the pollution rate in the country is relatively high, which creates the necessity for clean energy. While these factors exacerbate the social and economic problems in Pakistan, TAPI is expected to be a solution for them to some extent (Mehrzaei and Safai, 2019: 11). In addition, a consortium is planned to be formed to export some of the Turkmen gas as liquefied natural gas from Pakistan's Gwadar Port to various parts of the world. In this way, Turkmenistan can export more gas to

the world, TAPI's capacity can be increased, and Pakistan can become an important country in energy trade (Yıldırım, 2023: 372).

Pakistan can leverage TAPI to increase India's geopolitical dependence on the country. After all, acting together with Beijing, with which it has strong relations, Islamabad has contained New Delhi from the north. This gives Pakistan geopolitical and psychological predominance. In case India seeks to establish a land connection with Turkestan, the shortest possible route, it will need Pakistan's approval and will have to pay for the transit. For example, Pakistan and India will pay Afghanistan for Turkmen gas arriving through this country. Similarly, India will pay a transit fee to Pakistan. In 2012, the parties agreed on a rate of 50 cents per million cubic feet of gas per day (Bhutta, 2012).

India is among the rising powers of the world economy as well as the South Asian economy. Due to its image as an alternative to China, it is becoming one of the world's new factories. While the country's production is on the rise, its energy demands are also growing. New Delhi is turning to various alternative energy sources, and within the framework of sustainable development, it is striving to secure energy resources and ensure energy security (Dadwal, 2009: 665). The nearby Turkmen gas has become crucial in this context (Roy, 2011: 665), as proximity means lower costs. Additionally, India aims to balance China's influence in the region, open up to Turkestan, and access cleaner energy sources. The China issue remains vital for India, which seeks to ensure that Indian companies play a crucial role in the pipeline's construction—not only to strengthen its presence in Turkestan and South Asia but also to provide profit and experience for its companies. However, the possibility of China's inclusion in TAPI raises concerns for India (D'Souza, 2011: 4).

One of the reasons why TAPI and Turkmenistan are crucial for India is to have access to Russian energy. Having been sanctioned due to the Russia-Ukraine War, Russia is trying to strengthen its relations with India. The geographical distance between the two states is considerable, and Russia's connection with India can be established via Turkestan. In this process, Moscow can use TAPI with its pipeline to Ashgabat for energy exports to New Delhi (Strokan, 2023: 14-15). This increases the importance of Turkmenistan and TAPI for India.

There are different claims about TAPI's completion date. However, it

appears that it will not be implemented for a few more years as it is still in the construction process. The reasons for the interruption of the process can be listed as the 2001 Afghanistan intervention, Afghanistan's insufficient capacity, geographical difficulties, limited integration between regions, various security threats, and financial problems (Kocak, 2016).

Opportunities

It is possible to talk about recently growing relations between Turkestan and South Asian states. On the one hand, Pakistan is working on realizing the Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor via Afghanistan by reaching an agreement with Uzbekistan. On the other hand, India is also taking steps to strengthen its political, economic, and security relations with Central Asian Turkic states. These states generally seek closer ties with Afghanistan. At this point, the TAPI pipeline is regarded as a key project that can have a significant impact on boosting regional cooperation and mutual benefits under a win-win framework. This is because the corridor contributes to the energy security of countries and creates new economic opportunities and employment (Gaur, 2023: 55).

The energy-based relations established between the regions will contribute to the economic strengthening of both regions and especially to the energy stability of South Asian countries. This impact will not be confined to Turkmenistan, and other Central Asian countries are also likely to pivot to the region with various projects. For example, the ongoing efforts to implement CASA-1000 between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan serve as a concrete indicator of this. Moreover, Russia, seeking access to South Asia, can increase the region's benefits through new investments, cheap energy, and infrastructure improvements when transferring energy to the region. Planning to sell energy to South Asia through TAPI, Russia has previously announced its interest in being involved in such projects (Chandra, 2011: 554-555).

TAPI brings together actors who are, in fact, rivals or adversaries around a single project. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India have various problems and prejudices against each other, which increases the tension in the region and renders cooperation difficult. For example, the

Durand Line remains a historical issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan. There are also various controversies between Pakistan and India regarding the Kashmir region. For a long time, India took a stance against the Taliban because it was a radical group. However, TAPI has demonstrated the feasibility of cooperation by bringing the parties together on a common project (Taye and Ahmed, 2021: 565).

Risks

Although Pakistan and India accord with each other in the TAPI context, there are significant problems and hostilities between the parties, which are likely to impact the project. Although the two states rhetorically share a win-win approach, the extent of the hostility between them weakens the possibility of the project being completed. It is believed that Pakistan is unlikely to implement a project that would allow India to meet its energy needs and rise as a regional power center through its own territory. In India, on the other hand, the idea of energy dependence on Pakistan and ensuring energy security within this framework is a significant concern. In addition to the problems between the parties, the impact of China's regional policy and Pakistan-China relations remains significantly uncertain. Besides, Turkmenistan seeks to exert pressure on the parties by taking various steps for the implementation of the project (Strokan, 2023: 8-9). In short, the problematic relations between Pakistan and India negatively affect the parties' approach to TAPI.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are among the involved actors with existing issues between them. First, the parties have a border dispute known as the Durand Line. Although the administrations in Afghanistan changed, their ideas about the borders remain the same, and the Pashtuns aim to establish a large Pashtunistan, which is against the territorial integrity of Pakistan as per current borders. Pakistan, on the other hand, seeks to have the rulers of Afghanistan accept the line. For this reason, there have even been conflicts between the parties at different periods. Second, Pakistan was previously a part of India and gained independence from the British. The Taliban considers Pakistan a British legacy having no religious characteristics despite it being an "Islamic Republic." Third, a terrorist threat exists in the region. In particular, the

Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carries out various attacks on Pakistan and has ties to the Taliban (Kaya, 2023: 302-304; Kaya and Başaran, 2023: 415-417). These three main factors render the relations between Pakistan and the Taliban problematic, and a potential conflict could jeopardize TAPI.

South Asia is a region that hosts risks and threats as significant as the Middle East today. ISIS, for instance, is attempting to establish a presence and organize in the region. Terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda, TTP, and separatist Baluch groups are also conducting attacks in the region. Various measures need to be taken for security both during the construction process of the line and afterward. The Taliban announced that it will take the necessary steps for the security of the section passing through Afghanistan (Fazl-e-Haider, 2024). Still, the Pakistani part of the project is also problematic. The separatist Baluch groups are noted for their targeting of various investments and projects in the region (Saira and Javed, 2022: 296-297). Therefore, the security of TAPI is a critical topic of discussion. One of the factors that should not be overlooked in the region is energy-rich Iran. The US is known to support TAPI in order to weaken Iran's energy advantage in the region (Dadwal, 2011: 579). Both the US influence and the competition that will emerge between energy-rich countries such as Turkmenistan and Iran may prompt Tehran to oppose the project. In this regard, there have been discussions about implementing a pipeline project on the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI), to which Iran may consequently view TAPI as a rival. In addition, while the US seeks to diminish Iran's importance in the regional energy equation by supporting TAPI, Russia aims to participate in both projects to prevent Iranian and Turkmen gas from flowing to the West. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, has been reluctant to accept the requests to participate in the projects, at least in the 2010s, in order not to give Russia such an advantage (Yenikeyeff, 2011: 73).

Conclusion

TAPI has the potential to be a crucial bond and bridge between Turkmenistan and South Asia. Although its relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are problematic, Turkmenistan is engaging in various

initiatives and negotiations to implement the project. As a result of the relative stability provided by the Taliban, Afghanistan has once again emerged as one of the countries included in regional projects. While Afghanistan serves as a bridge in various projects due to its geopolitical location, the relations between Turkmenistan and South Asia are likely to develop in a multidimensional way.

Although the project provides significant advantages to all participating countries, it also carries risks. These risks have long hindered the construction of TAPI, and it evidently contains such a possibility today. As a result, many experts have long viewed TAPI as a dream or an unfeasible project. Today, while the political will shown by states has increased the likelihood of the project's realization, terrorism or problems between the participating states still raise concerns. In addition, the policies of countries such as Iran, China, Russia, and the USA to influence the course of or participate in projects have the potential to bring regional and global competition.

TAPI is a significant project for Türkiye. Türkiye supports Turkmenistan's efforts to expand its energy markets and ensure economic stability. Therefore, it advocates for Ashgabat to export energy resources to multiple markets. One of Türkiye's key objectives is to have pipelines transporting Turkmen gas to the West pass through its territory. The pipeline, which will pass through Turkish territory following the Turkmenistan-Caspian Sea-Caucasus route, would offer Türkiye both economic and geopolitical advantages. Additionally, Türkiye would have the opportunity to become a direct customer of Turkmen gas. Türkiye also wants countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan to achieve stability. It supports the establishment of regional peace, including India, and the strengthening of relations between the parties within a win-win framework. Therefore, Türkiye considers the TAPI project to be a crucial initiative.

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CENTRAL ASIA-SOUTH ASIA ELECTRICITY TRANSMISSION AND TRADE PROJECT (CASA-1000)

Dr. Ghulam Farooq Keskin

Introduction

CASA-1000 is a \$1.2 billion regional electricity transmission project that aims to facilitate electricity trade from Central Asia to South Asia. Its primary objective is to provide a reliable electricity supply—approximately 1,300 megawatts (MW)—from the Central Asian countries with electricity surplus (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) to the South Asian countries with electricity deficit (Afghanistan and Pakistan) (World Bank, 2024). The foundations of the project were laid in the early 2000s during regional cooperation talks on the need to utilize the energy surplus of Central Asian countries and to address the energy deficit of South Asian countries. In 2006, the CASA-1000 project was officially launched through an agreement between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. International financial institutions such as the World

Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank provided support to finance the project. The project was formally inaugurated in Dushanbe in 2014 with a ceremony attended by the leaders of the participating countries (Daily Times, 2023).

Economic Impacts

The project has the potential to generate significant economic impacts across Central Asia and South Asia. Primarily, its implementation will increase energy supply security and stimulate economic growth. Afghanistan and Pakistan face limitations in industrial production and economic development due to insufficient energy supply. The additional electricity supply from CASA-1000 will alleviate these countries' energy deficits. It will allow for more stable and efficient production in the industrial, agricultural, and service sectors. Another economic impact of the project is the increase in energy trade and the strengthening of regional cooperation accordingly. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will generate income by exporting surplus energy, while Afghanistan and Pakistan will facilitate their economic activities by importing energy. Such energy trade will reinforce economic relations and foster greater interdependence among the countries. In addition, regional cooperation can promote political stability and peace, which can positively affect economic development in the long run (Abbas et al., 2019).

Another substantial economic impact of the CASA-1000 project is its potential to create direct and indirect employment. The project provides employment opportunities for thousands of people during the construction and operation phases. In addition, infrastructure investments associated with the project contribute to local economies and create new business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. This, in turn, can accelerate economic development in the implementation regions and contribute to an overall improvement in regional living standards.

Geopolitical Impacts

The project aims to deliver many benefits. First, it will increase energy security in the region by diversifying energy sources for Afghanistan

and Pakistan. In addition, it promotes economic growth and development by providing a stable energy supply in the region. The project also aims to strengthen regional cooperation and interdependence among the participating countries, especially by incentivizing Afghanistan (Iqbal, 2023). The long-lasting civil war in Afghanistan has isolated the country from all regional dynamics. Therefore, such projects are crucial in integrating Afghanistan into the modern state system.

The project strengthens the energy connection between Central Asia and South Asia, making these regions more interdependent, which will, in turn, generate an improvement in energy trade and strengthen regional integration (Bagir, 2024). Afghanistan will emerge as a significant energy transit country with the project. This will increase the country's geopolitical importance and allow it to have a greater say in the international arena. At the same time, major infrastructure projects will contribute to Afghanistan's economic development and support the country's stability (Khan, 2023).

China and India

The CASA-1000 project plays a crucial role in China's strategic and economic interests in Central Asia and South Asia. China contributes both financially and technically to the project. China's participation in energy projects in Central Asia and South Asia aims to enhance regional energy security and diversify its own energy supply. By investing in these projects, China expands its regional influence and seeks to achieve its strategic goals within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Besada, 2024). China's presence in Central Asia creates not only economic but also geopolitical impact. By bolstering regional energy security, China is strengthening the geopolitical importance and stability of Central Asia. This reinforces the international position of the regional countries and increases China's strategic influence in Central Asia (Otorbaev, 2024).

China's competition with India over CASA-1000 is significant in terms of energy security and regional influence. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, China and India established formal relations with the five former Soviet Republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In recent years, both India and

China have developed distinct strategies to strengthen their ties with these resource-rich economies, collectively referred to as the Central Asian Republics. China's strategy is centered on the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while India follows the 'Connect Central Asia' policy. China's proximity to the Central Asian Republics, its financial strength, and policy consistency have enabled it to advance more swiftly than India (Wani, 2020).

In December 2017, the contract for the implementation of the project was signed in Kabul by the chairman of the board of directors of Breshna Company and the directors of two Indian companies, KEC and KPTEL, in the presence of then-President Ashraf Ghani. Thus, this agreement marked India's more active involvement in the region's geopolitical conflict, especially in Afghanistan, and created a geoeconomic environment among the parties. The provision of electricity to Pakistan by Indian companies through infrastructure projects ensured India's geopolitical and geoeconomic superiority in Afghanistan and served as a catalyst for a slight rapprochement between Pakistan and India.

This project can help India strengthen its economic and strategic ties with Central Asia, which is a part of India's strategy to increase its regional influence and counterbalance China's influence. Moreover, India invests in such projects to contain China's influence in Central Asia and to realize its own strategic objectives. India's participation in such projects is also driven by its consideration of the positive impact these projects can have on economic development.

Russia

The impact of the CASA-1000 project on Russia is significant, as it poses a substantial threat to Russia's geopolitical and economic interests in Central Asia. Russia has traditionally had a major influence on energy resources and infrastructure projects in the region. However, projects like CASA-1000 could weaken Russia's control over regional energy supplies and reduce its regional influence (Nikolaevsky, 2024). Primarily, the project, as an infrastructure initiative aimed at transporting electrical energy from Central Asia to South Asia, allows Central Asia to diversify its energy exports. This could reduce the regional countries'

energy dependence on Russia, weakening Russia's position as an energy supplier in the region. The inclusion of countries such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the CASA-1000 project, in particular, could facilitate the opening of these countries to markets outside Russia, limiting Moscow's influence over these countries (Keskin et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this project amounts to an increased investment in Central Asia's energy infrastructure, which could undermine Russia's strategic advantage in the region. China and India invest in such projects to enhance their presence in the region and ensure their energy security. Russia remains wary of such initiatives, creating a new energy balance in the region and competing with its own energy exports.

Pakistan and Iran

Pakistan plays a critical role as an importer in this project. The project is viewed as a significant step that will help alleviate Pakistan's energy crisis by providing it with the additional electricity needed during the summer months. The project was halted after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, but operations resumed in 2022, receiving a complete welcome from Pakistani officials (Ahmed, 2024). In terms of Pakistan's energy security, such projects can play a vital role in achieving sustainable growth and development goals. They are also important for Pakistan's regional cooperation and diplomacy strategies because the project has the potential to strengthen economic and political relations between South Asia and Central Asia, reinforcing Pakistan's role in the region (World Bank, 2021).

At the same time, the project enhances Pakistan's strategic partnership with China. As a close partner in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, Pakistan is pursuing a strategy that will increase China's regional influence in this project as well. Pakistan also takes into account the competition with India for access to Central Asian energy resources within the scope of the project. Therefore, Pakistan's strategic advantage by cooperating with China in this project could further deepen its rivalry with India (Pandita, 2024).

However, one of the biggest challenges facing Pakistan is ensuring the security of the project's energy transmission lines through Afghanistan.

The security in Afghanistan has become even more fragile, especially after the Taliban took control, which has raised concerns about potential attacks on energy transmission lines. The success of the project will hinge on resolving security issues in Afghanistan and strengthening regional security cooperation (Faizi, 2022). Weaknesses and technical difficulties in Pakistan's domestic energy infrastructure may also hinder the successful implementation of CASA-1000. High costs and infrastructural deficiencies are among the factors slowing down the project. Uncertainties also exist regarding the country's existing energy infrastructure's ability to process and transmit electricity from Central Asia at full capacity. Therefore, for Pakistan, CASA-1000 is more than just an energy project; it is an initiative with multidimensional impacts in terms of regional cooperation, economic development, and geopolitical gain. While this initiative ensures Pakistan's energy security, it also has the potential to shape its political relations in the region.

Iran has long been known to aspire to play an active role in energy exports to South Asia. It has sought to cooperate with energy-demanding countries, especially India and Pakistan, to supply natural gas and oil. However, projects like CASA-1000 could compete with Iran's energy trade, as they provide alternative routes for Central Asian energy resources to reach South Asia, bypassing Iran.

Iran's geographical location, border connections with the countries involved in the project, and existing infrastructures for Central Asian energy resources render Iran to be indirectly affected by this project. Iran continues to strengthen its own energy infrastructure in order to remain active in the regional energy dynamics and to avoid falling behind in geopolitical competition. However, due to the tensions between the West and Iran, this project sidelines Iran, leading to its isolation and naturally causing concern in Iran (Alibabalu, 2018). Such discomfort is easily noticeable when examining Iranian sources, and this project is even claimed to have been designed by the US and Türkiye against Iran (Alavizade, 2016).

Türkiye

Although Türkiye is not a direct player in this project, it may show interest in such initiatives in line with its strategic culture and as part

of its long-term strategic goals of enhancing its historical influence in Central Asia (Sadri Alibabalu, 2020). Türkiye can facilitate this goal by participating in projects like CASA-1000, contributing through technology transfer and human resource provision, thereby strengthening its economic and political ties with the Central Asian Turkic Republics. China's investments in energy infrastructures in Central Asia within the scope of the Belt and Road Initiative may challenge Türkiye's role in regional energy projects. Therefore, Türkiye can participate in similar projects in terms of both energy transmission lines and regional cooperation through strategic partnerships.

Such projects will contribute to Türkiye's strengthening of its energy and economic diplomacy, allowing it to play a more effective role in the regional energy market (Mirzaee et al., 2014). As a result, Türkiye should approach such regional energy projects with a strategic perspective and increase its indirect strategic participation in them. In short, such projects will enhance Türkiye's relations with Central Asia, position it as a key player in regional competition, and, at the same time, reinforce its historical ties with Central and South Asia.

Conclusion

The CASA-1000 project is a major energy initiative for both Central Asia and South Asia, promoting regional cooperation and increasing energy security. It has become a focal point of multifaceted geopolitical competition, with key players like China, India, Russia, and Pakistan involved. China aims to increase its influence in the region by making major investments in energy infrastructure within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. In this context, projects like CASA-1000 offer significant opportunities that support China's regional strategic interests. India, on the other hand, views CASA-1000 as a means to secure energy resources and counterbalance China's influence in Central Asia. Both countries are trying to align this project with their own strategic goals and aim to increase their regional influence.

Moreover, Russia is a key player striving to maintain its historical and strategic influence over Central Asia. CASA-1000 is perceived as a threat to Russia's energy sovereignty as Central Asian countries seek to export energy to South Asia rather than cooperating with Russia. Still, instead

of directly opposing such projects, Russia may prefer to maintain its control over energy resources and facilities in the region and indirectly exert influence on the projects. In addition, Russia may cooperate with China or support India in becoming more active in the project and safeguarding its influence in Central Asia. These strategic balances strengthen Russia's efforts to preserve its influence in the region.

Pakistan is a critical target country in the CASA-1000 project, serving as a strategic market. With support from both the US and China, Pakistan's participation in this project is vital for addressing its energy needs and advancing its energy infrastructure. However, Pakistan is likely to face serious problems in ensuring the security of the project, especially since the energy lines that will pass through Afghanistan may be affected by the security vulnerabilities in the region. Additionally, Pakistan aims to gain significant benefits from CASA-1000 through its strategic partnership with China. China's investments in Pakistan and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can strengthen Pakistan's energy infrastructure and facilitate the effective implementation of CASA-1000.

From Iran's perspective, this project is a step against Iran's interests. In fact, Iran seeks to be the primary energy exporter to Pakistan and even India. However, such projects hinder this desire. In conclusion, the CASA-1000 project is a major initiative aimed at increasing energy security and encouraging regional cooperation. While it offers economic and strategic benefits for the countries involved, it also leads to deepening geopolitical competition. The increasing competition between China and India intensifies the struggle for access to energy resources in Central Asia, and the roles of countries such as Russia and China in this project will determine regional dynamics. As China increases its regional influence with its investments in energy infrastructure, India strives to be a balancing power against this influence. Pakistan, on the other hand, is a key player in this project in meeting its energy needs and strengthening its strategic partnership with China.

However, the most significant risks to this project are the security status in Afghanistan and the infrastructural challenges. If these challenges can be overcome, CASA-1000 will increase energy security and stimulate economic growth in both South and Central Asia. It will also continue to shape strategic competition for the distribution and use of energy resources in the region.

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BANGLADESH, CHINA, INDIA, AND MYANMAR ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (BCIM)

Assoc. Prof. Md. Nazmul ISLAM

Introduction

Initially a significant endeavour, the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) has since adopted a more gradual approach. Generally, a corridor is a crucial route for the success of commercial, business, infrastructure, energy, cultural, and diplomatic interaction. However, due to the state's priorities, such initiatives may lose their momentum. The BCIM economic corridor is one such effort. Despite its geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic significance, the BCIM program remains the most profitable corridor for the South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia regions. This chapter, therefore, will explore the significance and potential of the BCIM economic corridor from a geopolitical standpoint, as well as the future problems that must be addressed to ensure the success of this vital endeavour.

Originating as an academic discussion in the 1990s (Rahman, 2015), the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) has evolved into a landmark initiative for regional connectivity. The project gained significant momentum following a pivotal meeting in 2013 between Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (Rashid, 2013). During this meeting, the leaders explored ways to establish an effective trade corridor connecting South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia.

With its primary focus on geoeconomics and geopolitics, the BCIM corridor was designed to physically connect the partner countries, starting from Kunming, the capital of China’s Yunnan Province. Additionally, this province is located near Myanmar, which is geo-strategically important for China, India, and Bangladesh. This was the way the four countries—Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar—were connected with this initiation where the corridor was fixed through the city of Kunming to Kolkata, and then it subsequently linked the Mandalay in Myanmar to the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong in Bangladesh (Krishna, 2013).

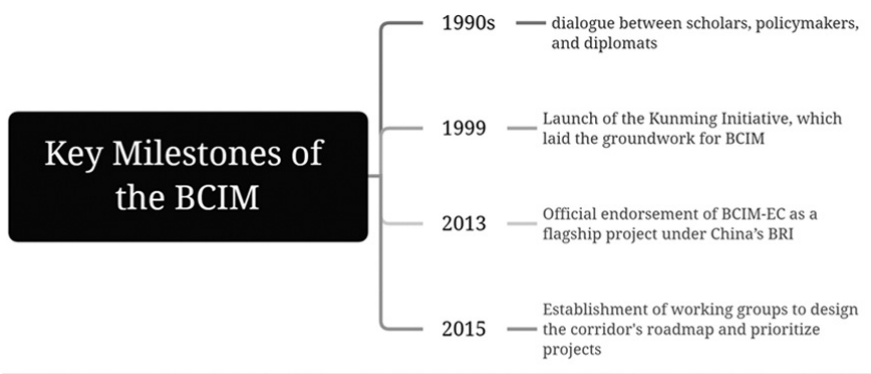


Figure 01: Key Milestones of the BCIM
Source: Compiled by the Author

China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed to extend the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM), which primarily focuses on Asia through trade engagement, infrastructural development, economic partnership, and cultural cooperation.

Though there are certain geopolitical complexities in the region, BCIM still remains a potential initiative. Connecting three regions such as South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, is indeed a great strategic aspect of the BCIM. This chapter, therefore, will explore the areas of opportunities and the possible challenges of the BCIM corridor from the perspectives of the three regions.

BCIM and Geopolitics: Implicates the Regional and Global Context

Geopolitically and geoeconomically, the BCIM corridor covers the three key regions of the world, which spans South Asia's Bangladesh and India, East Asia's China, and Southeast Asia's Myanmar. Additionally, it includes geo-strategic areas such as the Bay of Bengal of the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region. Apart from that, Asia's mega and key cities, such as Kunming, Kolkata, Dhaka, and Mandalay, will be integrated by this corridor, which are important hubs for logistics, trade, and business (The Daily Star, March 15, 2015).

Yet, the proposed idea of the BCIM is still in very slow mode, largely due to India's negligence in taking part in the flagship of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Additionally, China's prioritization of other flagship projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) has further complicated the realization of BCIM. However, the geo-economic benefits of BCIM remain evident. By enhancing its effectiveness, member countries could reduce trade barriers and transportation costs while facilitating the seamless movement of goods, logistical support, and production continuity (Singh, April 29, 2021).

Moreover, BCIM has the potential to strengthen people-to-people connections rooted in shared historical, civilizational, political, cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties (Islam, 2023; Islam, 2024). As both China and India emerge as significant powers in international politics (Basmajian, Schutt, Tajik, & Véissid, 2024; Fuad, 2024a; Fuad, 2024b), this initiative could unlock greater access to large markets. This, in turn, would enable the four participating countries and their neighbours to advance their economic and infrastructural development (Xinhua, February 21, 2012).

Amid the strategic priorities of member countries, such as India's Act East Policy and China's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the BCIM corridor has encountered significant strategic rivalries. Both China and India view the initiative through the lens of competition, considering it a potential challenge to their respective future projects. However, for Bangladesh and Myanmar, BCIM represents a valuable tool for fostering future collaboration and partnerships, offering notable benefits (Barlow, 2013).

Prospects and Benefits of the BCIM Corridor

From a geopolitical perspective, alliances, partnerships, and collaborations are essential tools for nations to strengthen their positions and emerge as influential players in the contemporary world order. In this context, the BCIM corridor holds significant potential, bringing together several influential nations, including China and India, whose closer relationship could mark a historic shift. If the corridor successfully progresses with its projects, it would not only benefit the major players but also provide substantial trade and economic opportunities for smaller nations in South and Southeast Asia, fostering regional growth and development.

The BCIM corridor spans 1.65 million square kilometers, encompassing an estimated 440 million people across regions such as Yunnan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, West Bengal, Bihar, and northern Indian states (Barlow, 2013). This economic corridor spans three regions, encompassing not only land routes but also crucial maritime pathways, which are of significant geostrategic and geo-economic importance. This includes the maritime trade routes linking the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean, an area poised to play a vital role in the region's future. For all member countries, the blue economy is a top priority, and the development of these maritime routes offers immense potential for economic growth and regional integration (Yesmin, 2019).

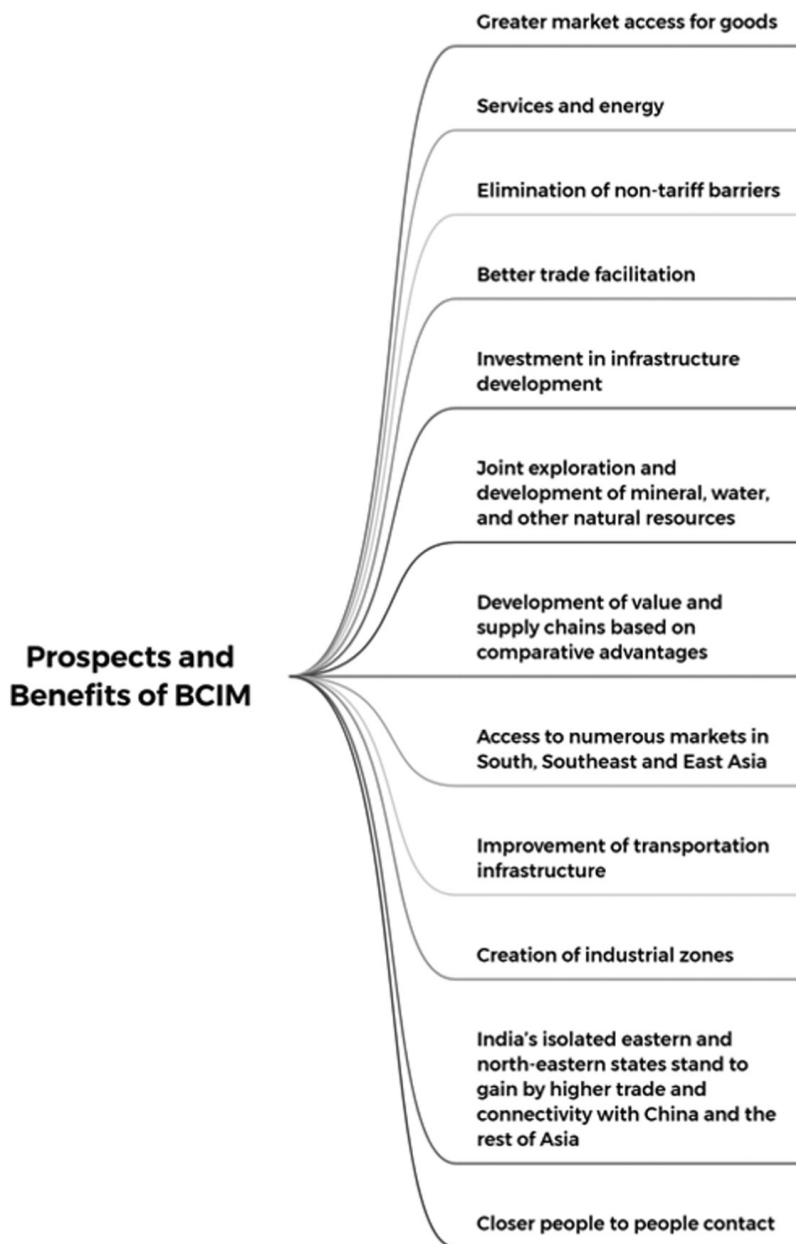


Figure 02: Prospects and Benefits of BCIM

Source: Compiled by the Author

From the perspective of a specific country, such as India's context, the BCIM corridor will be a significant corridor that will connect India's northeastern states with the outside world for the purposes of global markets. Additionally, because of the BCIM corridor, many enterprises in these regions can introduce and promote their products and goods in international markets through China's Yunnan province, especially through the transport and trade corridor.

For China, the BCIM would be a wonderful and highly beneficial corridor, as it will connect the Yunnan province with Chattogram which will help this landlocked province to get connected with the Bay of Bengal and ultimately with the Indian Ocean. Even through Myanmar, through this corridor, China can extend its broader partnership with the Southeast Asian region.

From Bangladesh's perspective, the BCIM is a massive opportunity as it can extensively connect Bangladesh with India's Northeastern region, Myanmar and China, which will indeed extend the cross-border trade and investment for Bangladesh. Additionally, for both Bangladesh and Myanmar, this corridor will provide extensive access to major powers like China and India, offering substantial benefits. If the BCIM projects are successfully implemented, they will likely attract more international partners, transforming the region into a hub for international trade and business. Consequently, besides benefiting China and India, this initiative will significantly aid Bangladesh and Myanmar in introducing their goods and services to global markets.

The economic benefits to Bangladesh from the BCIM corridor would be substantial. The East-West corridor is particularly important for Bangladesh, as the majority of its trade with India is conducted through land ports, presenting significant opportunities to reduce transport costs if the overland route with China is operationalized. However, the North-South Economic Corridor should be of key interest to Bangladesh, as it would connect the BCIM hinterland with the Chittagong and Mongla ports, further enhancing trade and economic prospects (Rahman, 2015).

Challenges and Obstacles of the BCIM

While the BCIM economic corridor holds great potential, it faces several significant obstacles, particularly concerning the priorities of the involved countries. These challenges include geopolitical complexities, a low level of mutual trust, and geo-economic as well as inter-regional trade competition.

Locating the geopolitical complexities is crucial for grasping the priorities of the BCIM member countries. For instance, China, a core member of BCIM, has recently demonstrated other regional priorities, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Moreover, China does not include BCIM in its forthcoming prioritized project list. China prioritizes specific countries over the establishment of multi-country corridors, such as the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) or the China-Bangladesh Economic Corridor (CBEC), which reflects its reluctance to emphasize more intricate initiatives like the BCIM.

India is another core country of the BCIM economic corridor. It was one of the initiators of this corridor; however, as India did not show its interest in BRI, then China relegated the entire initiative backstage. Additionally, India sees this initiative as a geopolitical and trade rivalry where competing with China would be difficult for India if it were about trade, investment, and infrastructure. Rather than working and partnering with China, India seeks to extend its own partnership with other member countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar.

One of the other geopolitical truths is that the larger fish always eat or kill the smaller fish. Thus, in reality, competing with China or India is a real problem for other member countries, as they are simply small fish in the field of geopolitical competition. Without having good mutual trust, it is quite challenging to see the prospective light for the future of the BCIM.

Conclusion

One of the most commendable aspects of the BCIM Economic Corridor is its ability to unite and connect four countries of significant geo-political

tical, geo-economic, and geo-strategic importance. This is particularly noteworthy given its position at the crossroads of three critical regions: South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the initiative is spearheaded by China, a global leader in trade, economy, investment, and infrastructure development, which adds momentum and optimism to its potential success.

By fostering direct capital investment, creating employment opportunities, expanding markets, and facilitating intelligence sharing, the BCIM corridor holds immense promise not only for the participating countries and regions but also for the global economy, contributing substantially to its growth and development.

However, challenges remain, particularly the ongoing confrontations between two key member states, China and India, stemming from their respective national priorities and interests. If these nations can set aside narrow nationalist agendas and prioritize broader collaboration and connectivity among the four countries, the BCIM Economic Corridor has the potential to emerge as one of the most successful connectivity initiatives globally.

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REGIONAL COOPERATION ORGANIZATIONS

SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

Aslan Balcı

The Origin of SAARC

Throughout history, South Asian countries have faced many problems among themselves, such as border security, internal conflict, the sharing of natural resources, religion, and culture. Despite this, they came together and established the South Asian Regional Cooperation Organization (SAARC). It is hoped that this platform will contribute to regional peace as well as world peace.

SAARC, as a regional economic union, is considered a viable and effective bloc in South Asia, as are the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Comprising 2 billion constituents, the organization has taken its place among the leading equivalent examples.

The initial steps to establish SAARC included ambitious goals and were taken in Sri Lanka in 1980 with the aim of develop-

ing regional cooperation among neighboring countries. Subsequently, the framework of SAARC was formed with the initiative of the Foreign Ministers.

On 8 December 1985, the foundation of the association was set out with the aim of increasing the welfare of the nations and improving their quality of life, accelerating economic growth in the region, encouraging social and cultural development, and enabling the inhabitants of the region to live an honorable life by revealing their potential. The association's charter was approved in Dhaka with the participation of the heads of state (or government) of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The association's secretariat is in Kathmandu (1).

Afghanistan was accepted into the association at the 14th summit held in New Delhi in 2007. Countries such as the USA, EU, China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Myanmar, and Mauritius took part in the association as observers. (2)

Following the developments in SAARC closely as part of its close contact and cooperation with India, which has been gaining momentum with high-level visits in recent years; its active efforts to ensure stability and peace in Afghanistan; its current close relations with Pakistan; and the importance it attaches to the region, Türkiye applied to join SAARC with observer status in 2011. (3).

The Structure of SAARC

The association carries out its activities through different commissions.

The Summit: Consists of the Heads of State or Government. It is the most authoritative body of SAARC, meeting ordinarily once a year. Crucial decisions are made unanimously during this meeting, and disputed issues are excluded from negotiations.

Council of Ministers: Consists of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and convenes twice a year. It can meet extraordinarily upon the request of the members. It is the most active and essential commission of the association. The Council develops the policies of the organization, enhances cooperation among the members, and ensures that new cooperation ar-

eas are created and new issues that are in the interest of the association are treated.

Standing Committee: Consisting of the Foreign Secretaries, it ensures the monitoring and coordination of cooperation programs and holds meetings as often as deemed necessary. Further, the Committee ensures the approval of various programs and projects, especially finance, as well as the designation of priorities, provision of resources, and establishment of new areas of cooperation. Prepared reports, requests, and issues are submitted to the Council of Ministers. (4)

Integrated Programme of Action: The programme is conducted by the Technical Committee, working in the following different project areas: Agriculture and Rural Development, Environment and Forestry, Health and Population Activities, Meteorology, Postal Services, Prevention of Drug Traffic and Use, Rural Development, Science and Technology, Sports, Arts, Culture, Education, Tourism, Communication, Transportation, Human Resources Development, Women, Youth and Children in Development. (5)

Secretariat: Conducts daily work in addition to organization, legal support, and information transfer.

Involving programming and activity committees and working groups, the platform also hosts high-level Working Groups (6) to strengthen cooperation in the fields of Information and Communication Technologies, Biotechnology, Intellectual Property Rights, Tourism, and Energy.

There is no fee prescribed for the member states for the activities of the organization; each member pays into the funds on a voluntary basis. There are 18 different occupational groups that are members of the organization.

The Objective behind the Establishment of SAARC

The objectives of the association are outlined as such: “To promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials. To promote and strengthen

collective self-reliance among the countries of South Asia; to contribute to mutual trust, understanding and appreciation of one another's problems. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance in the economic, social, cultural, technical and scientific fields; to strengthen cooperation with other developing countries; to strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests; and to cooperate with international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes." (7)

The main purpose of the platform is to promote economic integration and cooperation with neighboring countries, to eliminate differences and border disputes between them, and, most importantly, to prevent possible conflicts (8).

Scholars argue that SAARC has not fully achieved its purpose of establishment and has various difficulties in effectively ensuring regional cooperation. This situation makes it difficult for the association to accomplish its goals of regional development, peace, and cooperation.

After British colonialism, South Asian countries implemented regionalism and established economic and political cooperation such as SAARC and ASEAN. Both organizations were founded with the aim of increasing regional development and distributing prosperity to the people. With the end of the Cold War, South Asia began to find a place in the new world. India, which had an attitude against foreign capital, has become the country that attracts the most foreign capital in the region today. India's unwillingness to share its experience and opportunities with its neighbors is among the reasons for the weakening of unity.

Effectiveness of the Association

SAARC's primary goal is to accelerate economic growth. Considering that the member states look for ways to penetrate each other's markets, they are unsuccessful in this regard. Small countries have difficulty freely selling goods to countries with strong economies. Since no serious producers in the region other than India and Pakistan exist, others do not have high-value-added products to sell. However, if the people can freely sell their locally manufactured products to India and neighboring countries, their economies can possibly revive.

As the association develops methods to attract direct foreign investments to strengthen its economic infrastructure, foreign capital is expected to flow in, especially in the energy and geothermal fields.

SAARC has taken steps to continue mutually beneficial cooperation with some regional and international organizations. It signed memorandums of understanding with 25 organizations, such as the Islamic Development Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the European Commission. (9)

At the summits, agreements were reached on dozens of topics, such as countries' food policies, clothing, shelter, education, basic health services, population planning, environmental protection, and taking precautions for Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (10).

There are dozens of problems awaiting the members. The most important of these are border problems and terrorism. Although the leaders have come to terms regarding these issues, their impact has not been reflected in the field. Since the association's establishment, the members have sought a solution to regional poverty, but no significant progress has been made on this matter. The free trade agreement signed in Islamabad and entered into force in 2006 stimulated trade between the countries. (11)

Necessary steps were taken to implement certain projects at the leaders' summits. However, due to the disagreements between them, the interaction did not reach the desired level. While it was expected that the states would encourage cross-border trade, economic cooperation, and regional integration, the issues of individual state security and weapons development became prominent.

Contributions to the Region

SAARC significantly contributes to the economic, social, cultural, and environmental sectors by promoting regional cooperation in South Asia. Encouraging increased trade and economic cooperation among its members, the association supports regional trade agreements, economic cooperation projects, and economic growth in the member states.

It also ensures that cultural richness in the region is shared and the qual-

ity of education is increased through cultural exchange programs and educational projects among the member states. In this way, the peoples of the region are drawn closer to each other.

Cooperation in combating natural disasters and disaster management has been relatively achieved. Countries in the region have agreed to find more effective solutions to disasters. Air pollution is most common in China and India. Reducing the environmental damage in industries and cities has not been successful despite the recommendations in this direction.

Although the platform has put efforts into developing political cooperation and diplomatic dialogue to ensure regional peace and security, they have not been observed to suffice. More focus should be placed on combating global terrorism, drug addiction, and smuggling.

Criticisms towards the Association

SAARC is criticized for some of its negative aspects. Its interlocutors bring up some of these negative aspects alongside its contributions to the region. Some objections from within and outside the region are as follows:

Political and military tensions among members, especially the problems between India and Pakistan, hinder the effectiveness of SAARC and impede the functioning and decision-making processes of the forum.

Economic differences and asymmetry among the partners render the implementation of joint economic policies and projects into a deadlock. There are differences and inequalities in the cooperation processes between large and smaller economies.

The goals and effective work of the association are obstructed by the bureaucratic structure of the platform, management problems, and slow and ineffective decision-making mechanisms. The most significant barrier to the implementation of the projects is the fact that sufficient cooperation and coordination among the members cannot be provided.

Countries that are attentive to the region have concerns about the security problems among some SAARC members and the fight against terrorism. While such issues threaten regional and global security, the

acts of Islamophobia that have increased in India in recent years substantially trouble the region and its neighbors.

The nuclear tension in the region is increased by the nuclear capacities of India and Pakistan, and this poses a threat to global security. Independent countries call for curbing the tension that has emerged in recent years, especially in India, with the rise of far-right and Hindu nationalists to power.

There are serious criticisms towards some countries within the association regarding issues such as human rights violations, restrictions on freedom of religion and conscience, obstruction of the right to demonstrate and protest, and lack of direct public involvement in government.

The platform is making slow progress due to problems such as political tension, economic instability, lack of cooperation, and bureaucracy. Kumar Surendra states in his article that "...many countries within and outside the region aspire to be part of this forum. (...) SAARC is the only association in the world which has more observer members than full-fledged members." (12)

Those Who Wish for the Failure of the Association

As opposed to those who want SAARC to be successful, some regional and global actors wish for the failure of the association. This difference stems from geopolitical, economic, and strategic interests.

South Asia is a geopolitically strategic region. Some reckon that an influential forum in the region could threaten the interests of certain countries and organizations. Instability and competition in the region serve the interests of non-regional actors.

Rivaling India and unable to become a full member of the platform, the Beijing administration is the primary actor among those who do not want the association to be strong and successful because it wants to be the sole dominant power in the region. On April 27, 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced that they established BIMSTEC with member countries, keeping India out. (13) As SAARC's effectiveness diminishes, China will be stronger in the region.

Due to its geopolitical interests in South Asia, the US wishes to preserve

its role that seemingly protects the strategic balance in the region especially by taking advantage of the tension between Pakistan and India. The success of SAARC will weaken the US's influence in the region.

Western economic institutions consider that the association may harm their own economic interests if it promotes regional economic integration. The increase in trade between members will reduce the economic influence of Western countries in the region.

It is expected that organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which provide funds to underdeveloped countries in the region at high interest rates, will suffer serious income losses if member countries establish their own regional finance mechanisms. Such a prospect worries these organizations.

Economic integration in South Asia indicates that the countries in the region will become more competitive in the global economy. As such a situation will harm the economic interests of Western countries and companies in the region, they do not want the forum to be strong.

Can SAARC Change its Disorganized Structure?

The association is disorganized because it has not been able to resolve its structural and operational problems fully. The decisions taken are generally non-binding and do not have a coercive impact on member states. Therefore, member countries are reluctant to implement the decisions. The political apprehensions of India and Pakistan about each other play a major role in the failure of the platform.

The Islamabad and New Delhi administrations are pursuing power politics and trying to increase their relative power, bearing in mind the foul events experienced in the past and their concerns for occupation and annexation. How these countries politically view each other is the source of an endless arms race in the region.

Internal strife within the association and economic, political, and cultural differences among the members make it difficult to develop common policies. Political and military tensions between India and Pakistan, especially the Kashmir issue, have prevented SAARC from functioning effectively for more than forty years.

Since the withdrawal of the British colonialists from the region in 1947, more than four major wars have occurred in South Asia involving India, Pakistan, and China. The SAARC initiative is essentially dysfunctional due to the hostile relations between India and Pakistan. (14) Therefore, India, disfavoring a compromise, wants to leave SAARC and puts its efforts into establishing relations with other regional and international initiatives of which Pakistan is not a member. (15)

Due to the lack of full cooperation and coordination between the members, the association is having difficulty restoring its disorganized structure. The distrust, competition, and failure to implement common projects and policies among the member states hinder the organization's effectiveness. The slowdown in decision-making processes due to its bureaucratic structure causes the forum to remain in a disorganized structure. Thus, it is challenging for the organization to achieve its goals of regional development, peace, and cooperation.

For SAARC to be successful, the parties must sincerely respect each other's sovereign rights and withdraw from the occupied territories.

Türkiye's Relations with SAARC

The region has a sui generis structure. The forum has many structural deficiencies. Dr. Nuri states in his article, "The primary factor [for these deficiencies] is number of smaller countries versus a giant country, India, which continues to still harbour hegemonistic designs in the region. ... All nations proximate to India have problems and grouses with their giant neighbour." (16).

There is a consensus on the joint fight against terrorism that threatens the world and the region, cooperation against poverty that has persisted since the colonial period, and distributing prosperity to society. For this purpose, the association has brought the parties relatively closer by establishing the "South Asian Free Trade Area."

However, the adverse policies of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India have prevented further connection. New Delhi has created a new route for itself upon establishing closer ties with Israel, the US, and European countries. Despite the parties' decision to "not conduct operations in Kashmir," India's complete annexation of this region has a disrupting effect on peace efforts.

Significant declarations are published in the SAARC meetings held once a year, but since no one assumes responsibility, there is no consequential success. The biggest obstacle to achieving the desired results is the lack of essential mechanisms for putting ideas into action.

Trade between member states only accounts for 1% of global trade. In addition, these countries comprised the poorest segments of the world, and 50% of the world's illiterate population live in these countries. (17)

In order to establish permanent and effective cooperation in South Asia, where hunger, poverty, and overpopulation endure, there is a need for a consciousness concerned with the welfare of people, an increase in civil society organizations, and a mentality, goodwill, and planning to aim to tackle poverty and corruption.

Acting with a win-win logic, Türkiye is neither a stranger nor distant to the region. There are millions of friends and relatives in the region. Türkiye has assumed an observer status in SAARC in order to improve its friendship with member states and to ensure lasting peace. As the economic corridors that the regional countries partake in are activated in our country, these countries will start to show more interest in Ankara.

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BRAZIL, RUSSIA, INDIA, CHINA, AND SOUTH AFRICA COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (BRICS)

Aslan Balci

The Origin of BRICS

While the economies of Western countries that have completed the industrialization phase experience a decline, developing countries are stirred up and seek to form new alliances.

Calling upon a greater say by the developing countries in international issues, Brazil, Russia, India, and China founded the “BRIC” group in 2006. BRICS, an English acronym derived from the founding countries, was established and found its place in the literature, inspired by a research article written by Goldman Sachs’ chief economist Jim O’Neill in 2001.

BRICS emerged as an alternative to the West’s unilateral economic cooperation. It aimed at both economic and cultural cooperation among member states and has continuously increased its market volume since its establishment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin made a proposal after the

UN General Assembly Meeting in New York on September 20, 2006, and organized the first BRIC(S) “Ministers’ Meeting.” The foreign ministers of Russia, Brazil, and China, as well as the Indian Defense Minister, attended the meeting, and BRIC was established. (1)

Upon the initiative of Russia, the parties convened in 2009 in order to strengthen cooperation and find solutions to common problems, and they decided to establish a common platform. With the participation of South Africa in 2010, the organization was comprised of five members and took the name BRICS. (2)

A decision to approve the membership of the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia was taken at the BRICS Summit held in Johannesburg, the capital of South Africa, in August 2023, foreseeing their effective membership as of January 1, 2024, and thus increasing the members to ten. (3)

At the summit held in Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia, between October 22-24, 2024, the issue of granting new memberships was not on the agenda, and the “partner country” status was approved. Thus, the way to enlargement was paved.

BRICS is an organization that does not have a geographical basis, and Türkiye has the status of a “partner country.” The discontent arising from the excessively liberal conditions imposed by Western financial institutions steers emerging economies towards seeking new ways of cooperation. In this context, BRICS rules are built based on the conditions of the UN. This aims to establish a more egalitarian relationship between members and to balance the dominant actors in the global economy. (4)

Founded by emerging market countries, BRICS has swiftly become the world’s most vocal economic power. Some even argue that it “can be an alternative to the G20”. Advocating a multipolar global system, the BRICS group is considered an essential alternative organization to the current Western-centered system for Asian, African, and Latin American countries.

Geopolitical analysts reckon that BRICS is a more influential bloc than the G7 countries. This platform accounts for almost 31.5% of global GDP, while the share of G7 remains at 30.7%. According to The Economist, this clearly shows the power and significance of the BRICS countries, which are considered a strong counterbalance to Western influence. (5)

Assoc. Prof. Ali Oğuz Diriöz states in his article, “Although some consider BRICS an alternative to the global system, it should not be forgotten that it has not yet completed its organizational and institutional composition.” (6) BRICS is expected to challenge the new world order that developed along the Western axis and has become a multi-voiced and multi-colored force offering alternative solutions that are not based on colonialism. For this reason, the platform has become a safe haven for those weary of the oppressive attitude of the West.

The Objective of BRICS

BRICS aims to be the voice of developing countries worldwide and bring these countries to a stronger position in the global arena. Furthermore, it targets to significantly impact developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, focusing not only on geopolitical issues but also on economic cooperation, multilateral trade, and development.

The organization’s main purpose is to support member states’ economic growth, increase cooperation between developing countries, and have a greater voice in the international economic order. BRICS focuses on improving economic, political, and social cooperation among member states. The platform also offers an alternative to Western-centered financial institutions and aims to ensure that the global economic system is managed in a more just and balanced manner.

According to Mehmet Can Demir, the organization constitutes a counterbalance to the instability in the structure of international financial institutions dominated by the West, especially the IMF and the World Bank. BRICS was, in fact, founded to improve the established structure in these international financial institutions and to ensure that developing economies are given more ‘representation and voice.’ (7)

BRICS countries call for “greater weight and representation” of developing countries (8) and have built their bilateral relations on the principles of equality, non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual benefit.

The Crucial Bodies of the Organization

The bodies that play a crucial role in the functioning of BRICS ensure multilateral cooperation and coordination among members and provide the opportunity to act together in the international arena.

BRICS Summit: It is the highest-level decision-making body of BRICS. Chaired by the members on a rotating basis, the heads of state or government of the organization meet once a year. Decisions are taken unanimously, and during the meetings, the principles of openness, transparency, solidarity, equality, mutual understanding, multilateralism, respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence, and non-interference in internal affairs (9) are observed.

BRICS Foreign Ministers Meeting: These meetings are held regularly by the foreign ministers of the member states. Issues such as preparation for the summit, developing common attitudes on international issues, regional security, and economic cooperation are discussed here.

BRICS Business Council: The Council was established to promote cooperation between business representatives and works on cooperation projects in areas such as economic development, trade, and investment.

New Development Bank: Established in China in 2014 with a capital of \$250 billion, New Development Bank aims to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects in member states. Since its establishment, the bank has financed hundreds of projects in the basic infrastructure sector and attracts countries looking for alternative sources of credit, standing out as a counterweight to Western-dominated financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF (10).

BRICS Cooperation Fund: This fund is geared towards supporting member states' economic and social development projects.

BRICS Research and Development Center: The center operates as a body that promotes cooperation in the fields of scientific research, innovation, and technology transfer.

BRICS' Strategy and Sphere of Influence

As an informal organization, BRICS aims to have a significant impact on the global economy, politics, and diplomacy. According to IMF data, the group has expanded its total area to 45 million square meters by increasing its member count and it is among the world's largest developing economies. Furthermore, according to OPEC data, with an economic size exceeding \$29.5 trillion and an increased of 28 percent in the global economy, BRICS has reached 45 million barrels of daily oil production.

However, despite their great economic power, BRICS countries face poverty. Members aim to increase prosperity by cooperating on income inequality and social development.

BRICS also attaches great importance to regional security and develops common policies to ensure stability, aiming to be effective in the fields of combating terrorism and cybersecurity. The platform focuses on playing a greater role in the global balance of power by increasing cooperation in these broad areas.

Putin explains the organization's strategy for the near future as follows: "The main goal is to implement Strategy for the BRICS Economic Partnership 2025 and Innovative Action 2021-2024, ensure energy and food security, strengthen the role of BRICS in the international monetary and financial system, develop interbank cooperation and use national currencies in mutual trade." (11)

In addition, BRICS supports African countries by providing new opportunities in trade, investment, and technology transfer that can help increase Africa's development and integration. (12)

With mounting discussions about the weakening of the unipolar Western hegemony, the balance of power is observably shifting from the West to actors like BRICS.

Is Common Currency Possible?

The member states still use the US dollar as the trading currency. Although Russian and Brazilian politicians advocated switching to a common currency to compete with the dollar in international trade and financial markets, the other members did not accept this view at the 2023 summit. At the 2024 summit, on the other hand, a decision was made to work on a new currency and payment arrangement. Despite that it seems complicated for these countries with different economic models to switch to a common currency at the moment, it is expected that the development of an alternative payment system in the future will reduce risks in trade and overcome monopolies, and a significant success will be realized.

In an interview with the Financial Times, Jim O'Neill described the idea of a new currency among BRICS members as "ridiculous."

On the other hand, the President of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde, commented on the new payment system of BRICS, saying, “They are not ready for this.”

Reckoning that BRICS and the G20 can work together, Dr Irene Mia advocates providing more finances to developing countries for climate change and reducing the dominance of the US dollar. (13) Many developing countries complain about the US’s dominance over the global financial system and especially the power of the dollar. (14)

Putin stated that establishing a system to ensure payments between states is more important than creating a new reserve currency.

BRICS countries are experiencing record increases in their exports by keeping their costs low thanks to their access to cheap labor. Thus, these countries manage to keep their foreign exchange reserves above the desired level. Mehmet Enes Aşçı states, “Although they have different characteristics, especially in terms of administrative structure, the main elements of the organization have similar characteristics in terms of their share in international trade and the size of the foreign exchange reserves they obtain depending on the rate of direct foreign capital investments (15).”

If the standard payment system is implemented, half of the world’s population will benefit from this system.

Characteristics of the Members and Their Disagreements

The BRICS countries are important milestones in their regions. The initial quadruple founders represent different cultures. All of them operate informally outside the global capitalist economy. Their government types vary from authoritarian and Marxist governments to regionally sui generis democracy; thus, they have different domestic policies and economies. (16)

While China and India are important players in the manufacturing and service sectors, Brazil and Russia also stand out with their rich raw materials.

Despite having the largest economy in South America, Brazil maintains close relations with the US. The new members’ richness, especially in oil and natural gas reserves, increases the organization’s power and makes it more attractive in the international arena.

According to BBC News, India, alongside their border tensions, is China's main rival in the Asia-Pacific region. The New Delhi government puts efforts into a joint project with actors such as the US and Israel to diminish Beijing's sphere of influence. (17)

On the other hand, Russia and the new member Iran want to use the BRICS to form a bloc against the West. However, other members avoid moves to make the organization an openly anti-Western platform.

Countries interested in membership in BRICS consider the organization as an alternative to the global community dominated by traditional Western powers.

BRICS Enlargement and Türkiye's Partnership with the Organization

Türkiye's desire to join BRICS has emerged as an important development in the international arena. The current chairman, Russian Vice President Yuri Ushakov, announced that Türkiye had officially applied for full membership in the organization. Türkiye stands out with its potential to become the first NATO member in the BRICS group.

If Türkiye becomes a partner country to the forum, it is anticipated that it will make significant contributions to the organization's economic power with its geopolitical location, large market potential, and strong industry. Experts state that Türkiye, with its developing economy and manufacturing sector, creates new business opportunities for BRICS countries.

Being a group of developing economies, BRICS has decided on economic cooperation and partnership with countries such as South Korea, Mexico, and Türkiye. (19) Russian President Putin has increased the importance of this process by inviting Türkiye to BRICS. President Erdoğan has also emphasized the necessity of Türkiye joining BRICS. (20) In addition, Putin invited Azerbaijan to the organization and invited Erdoğan to Russia for the BRICS 2024 leaders' summit. Erdoğan commented at the summit, "We are determined to advance our dialogue with the BRICS family."

Historian Mehmet Perinçek told Sputnik, "If Türkiye joins BRICS, it will be the first NATO and OECD country to be part of this group. Those

who do not want this unfairly describe it as a 'shift of axis.' If Westerners can become members of a group in which they have interests, it is quite natural for Türkiye to use the same right." (21)

In a meeting with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan at the Kremlin Palace on June 26, 2024, President V. Putin stated that he was pleased with Türkiye's interest in BRICS and that he would "definitely support its desire to be with the countries of the organization" (22).

Foreseeing the obstacles ahead, Türkiye waited until September for membership and tried to overcome them. It used this period to avoid being caught off guard by countries that would have a negative attitude towards its membership in BRICS.

While China and Russia are eager to expand the number of BRICS members to increase their global influence, India and Brazil share a skeptical attitude. While India is concerned about its influence decreasing and the bloc falling under Chinese domination, Brazil argues that new members should be accepted transparently and based on consensus among existing members. (23)

South Africa expresses that more than 40 countries, of which 22 are Muslim, have declared their will to join BRICS (24) and that a similar number of countries are unofficially interested in BRICS membership (25).

The organization's granting membership to Türkiye, which has the status of a "partner country," will make significant contributions to the platform's economic power and trade volume. Experts who state that Türkiye will benefit BRICS members with its strong industry and developing economy predict that the BRICS market will grow with Türkiye's participation, import-export, and trade volume will expand, and thus, the way for the creation of new business opportunities will be paved. Türkiye's geopolitical power will dynamically and expediently contribute to BRICS.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that NATO membership does not prevent Türkiye from becoming a BRICS member. On the other hand, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said, "It is Türkiye's sovereign right to cooperate with BRICS countries." Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Hande Fırat, "I am confident that Türkiye has the power to make a significant contribution to the further development of BRICS." (26)

Conclusion

BRICS has become a significant platform with the potential to cooperate in many areas with its vast territories, rich natural resources, and large population. The demands of its members for economic and social integration allow them to develop closer relations in the political arena.

In a conjuncture where global tensions are increasing under the leadership of the US, the BRICS countries are trying to protect each other's political and economic interests and are focusing on restructuring the organization in order to strengthen multilateralism against war and occupation.

Emerging as an alternative to the Western-centered world economy, the BRICS proves itself to be a formation more prone to cooperation than Western countries in a period when currency crises, sanctions, trade wars, and regional security concerns are on the rise. (27)

It is predicted that BRICS will continue to develop and climb high as long as there are no disputes and conflicts among the member countries and their domestic problems are minimized. For this reason, the platform's members are called "Rising Powers."

Some experts predict that the BRICS will not be an effective and influential organization because there is no unity, energy, and commodity pricing among the members, and they do not have a reformist perspective. Since its establishment, efforts for cooperation in many areas have been successful. It is also argued that the autocratic structures and different worldviews of some members hinder genuine joint decision-making and that many members have a poor record of human rights.

Although there are complaints about multi-polarity and the impositions of the US, the BRICS countries are not observably enthusiastic about eliminating the deficiencies in their own structures. Another criticism is whether the BRICS members are really against the neo-liberal economic system. The members are not clear on this aspect since they have strong economic relations with the US and the West. However, it should be remembered that the very existence of the organization still maintains its pioneering in challenging Western institutions.

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SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)

Aslan Balcı

The Origin of SCO

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an international body established in Eurasia. It was named after Shanghai, where its first meeting was held. An important site of cooperation that controls nearly half of the world's population (3.4 billion), a quarter of the world's economy, and 20% of the world's oil reserves, the SCO has become a platform that attempts to breach the US hegemony in the world, advocating a "multipolar world."

The SCO aims to exchange information and cooperate in commercial, military, diplomatic, cultural, defense, and security fields and was initially established in 1996 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as the "Shanghai Five." It was renamed as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with the participation of Uzbekistan in 2001. India and Paki-

stan became full members of the nine-member organization in 2017, and Iran on April 4, 2023. (1)

When the Communist Eastern Bloc collapsed in 1991 and the Cold War ended, NATO's expansion into these regions concerned Russia and China. Thus, Russia decided to deepen its cooperation with the former Soviet republics.

In fact, since the SCO was founded under the leadership of Russia and China as a reaction to the US self-perception that it is the sole superpower in a unipolar world, the organization quickly increased its influence and attracted attention in the international arena, expanding its sphere of influence.

The organization aimed to ensure military, economic, and cultural cooperation among member states and to develop partnerships, especially in border security.

As a result of the cooperation initiated by Russia and China with the Central Asian Republics within the framework of the SCO, the US military presence and interests in the region were minimized, and contacts between the West and the Central Asian Republics were reduced to a minimum.

The platform did not consider itself an organization established against NATO, the EU and the West, but it did not want the West to have a say in its own region either. In his article, Prof. Süleyman Kızıltoprak stated that the organization "has an understanding that maintains its defensive position against the West's influence in Asia at the expense of itself. The organization's place and role in forming the new world order after the Cold War has been significantly limited. The main reason for this was the lack of consensus among the member states on the organization's general approaches to current problems of international politics and the global economy" (2).

Membership in the organization is realized in three stages: dialogue partner, observer, and full member. The observer states are Afghanistan, Belarus, and Mongolia, and the dialogue partners are Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Armenia, Cambodia, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Qatar. The US request to be an observer was rejected in 2005.

The Purpose of the Organization

Although the purpose of its foundation was border security, economic relations, and foreign trade also became among the organization's essential goals. The foundation of the SCO aimed to solve other problems such as drug trafficking, terrorism, international crimes, illegal migration, AIDS, and similar infectious diseases.

The leaders signed the platform's charter at the meeting held in St. Petersburg in June 2002. According to the charter, the organization's main goals are strengthening friendship, good neighborliness, and mutual trust among member countries; developing effective cooperation in economic-commercial, scientific-technical, cultural, educational, energy, transportation, environment, and other areas; and taking joint action to maintain regional peace and stability. (3)

Its main goals consisted of increasing coordination on foreign policy issues and taking joint action in the international arena. In addition, the platform's main goals included working on various areas such as international and regional issues and the "Development Strategy and Energy Cooperation" for the future (4).

Noting that the unipolar world has begun to be criticized loudly, Erdem Hepaktan stated in his article that Vladimir Putin underlined the mission of the organization in a sense by declaring, "A unipolar world is unacceptable" (5) at the Bishkek Summit in 2007.

The forum was accused of preventing NATO and the West from penetrating Asia and creating an adversary balance of power. Responding to the allegations, the leaders stated that the organization was not an alternative to NATO but that the SCO continued to expand and was one of the important centers of the "multipolar world order" that Russia and China increasingly voiced. (6)

Bates Gill, former director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, noted in his article for the Brookings Institution that the organization was founded because Russia and China wanted to act together against possible US interventions in Asia.

Examining the organization's goals, it is evident that it has military, political, and economic objectives. The main shortcomings of the organi-

zation were the lack of a fundamental objective and, more importantly, the difference between the expectations of China and Russia from the organization. While Russia focused more on opportunities for military cooperation, China continued its goal of increasing economic integration through the energy potential in the Eurasian region. (7)

Since its foundation, the organization has renewed its purpose and become an important platform for regional development and stability.

The Different Interests of the Member States

As an intergovernmental organization, the SCO is grounded on providing security in the areas under Russian and Chinese control in Asia and enhancing cooperation between these countries. China and Russia are concerned about the pro-independence movements in East Turkestan and the Caucasus, respectively. The member states aim to combat drug lords and multi-faceted relations, including military exercises. China's rapid economic growth and increasing energy needs played a major role in the foundation of the SCO. (8)

The organization has not established a binding structure on issues such as the free movement of people, capital, and products, its own flag, economy, politics, human rights and security, or free trade.

It is claimed that the organization is controlled by Russia and China and was established to strengthen their regional leadership and secure their borders. The most apparent indicator is that Russian and Chinese are the official languages, although the platform has nine members.

Underlining that each member has different interests, İlyas Kemaloğlu pointed out in his article, "Those with weak economies do not speak out against the hegemony of the countries in question. They are satisfied with the fact that they gain small benefits through the organization."

Kemaloğlu states, "Through the SCO, the Taliban administration in Afghanistan tries to legitimize its power; Iran, having problems with the West, attempts to escape its isolation in the international arena; Mongolia, squeezed between Russia and China, tries to develop economic relations with neighboring states. Moreover, being on the same side with two members of the United Nations Security Council, Russia and China, offers political benefits for other countries." (9)

Although China and Russia are working to encourage the use of local currencies instead of dollars in foreign trade in order to overcome Western sanctions, a concrete and alternative system has not yet been introduced.

Fundamental Bodies of SCO

In order for the organization to work efficiently, several main bodies were established by the decision made at the Moscow summit in 2003, and it was put into effect over time.

The Council of Heads of State makes decisions on the foundational purposes of the organization and member states. The Council meets regularly every June in member countries per Russian alphabetical order. The presidents of the members serve as the chairman of the organization for one year. Important issues that other councils consult in advance are decided here.

The Council of Heads of Government is the second most crucial sub-mechanism that meets once a year and has essential responsibilities such as approving the budget and making economic agreements.

The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs consists of the member states' foreign ministers. The Council meets one month before the Council of Heads of State and determines the agenda of the Council of Heads of State. It is one of the most functional bodies of the organization where international issues are discussed intensively.

Security Council gathering consists of senior figures from the foreign trade, defense, economy, transportation, education, culture, health, and justice ministries of member states.

Council of National Coordinators is an executive body that coordinates all activities of the organization, meets at least three times a year, and guides other bodies.

Council of Representatives is a significant council where representatives of cooperation areas as well as justice and defense ministers and police organizations, participate. The ground for comprehensive negotiations and agreements is laid here.

Located in Beijing, China, the Secretariat is a permanent institution where all the activities of the organization are documented and monitored on technical, legal, and organizational terms, and documents are prepared for subsequent activities.

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) Executive Committee's main duty is to coordinate and carry out joint action against international terrorism, separatism, and extremism activities. Its headquarters is in Tashkent. (10)

A decision taken at the Heads of State and Government Summit held in Tashkent envisaged the formation of five committees on electronic commerce, customs, quality control, investment incentives and transportation, and accordingly, the "Shanghai Development Fund" and the "Shanghai Business Board." (11)

Türkiye's Relations with SCO

Türkiye, located at the intersection of Asia and Europe, applied to the SCO in 2011. Its Dialogue Partnership status was unanimously granted at the SCO Heads of State Summit held in Beijing on June 6-7, 2012. The memorandum regarding the Dialogue Partner status was approved by the Council of Ministers Decision and published in Türkiye's Official Gazette dated 24.05.2017 and issued 30075. (12) Thus, the domestic legal approval process of the respective memorandum was completed in Türkiye.

This document envisages the development of cooperation between Türkiye as the Dialogue Partner, and the SCO on various issues, primarily regional security, the fight against terrorism, the prevention of drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as economic and cultural areas.

Türkiye attaches importance to the region by virtue of the "Asia Anew Initiative." During his term as Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan conveyed to Russian President Putin during his visit to Russia in 2005 that Türkiye wanted to become a member of the organization. He also communicated the request to Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who received it positively. The Chinese regime objected to Türkiye's request especially due to the East Turkestan issue and on the grounds that 'the appropriate ground for enlargement has not yet been established'.

Currently, Türkiye's association with SCO is at the level of a "dialogue partnership."

During his terms as Prime Minister and President, Erdoğan made dozens of statements lobbying for Türkiye's accession to SCO. In a speech in 2016, Erdoğan said, "Why shouldn't Türkiye be in, say, the Shanghai Five? I hope that when there is an improvement at this point, that is, when Türkiye is included in the Shanghai Five, Türkiye will be enabled to act much more comfortably in this regard." (13)

The membership request, frequently voiced by the head of state, has been on the SCO's agenda, and Türkiye has been invited to many summit meetings. Türkiye does not view the SCO as an alternative to the EU. Experts insist that the two are different organizations. Sadık Ünay, Director of Economic Research at the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), stated in his interview with the BBC that he considers the SCO as an important balancing element for Türkiye against the EU, both politically and economically.

He further argued that Türkiye's membership in the organization would not mean abandoning the European anchor altogether and shifting the axis towards the East, but rather, it would be a balancing act. Ünay said, "Türkiye can become a member of the SCO without cutting its relations with the EU. Such initiatives are necessary as well in terms of its access to Asian markets" (14).

Türkiye's potential accession to the organization is considered beneficial for itself and SCO members. It is expected that Türkiye will bring strength and dynamism to the SCO, especially in the fight against terrorism, economic corridors, trade, and international prestige, and will benefit the energy-rich countries of the organization in transportation and distribution due to its geographical location that acts as a bridge between Asia and Europe.

Türkiye's participation in the SCO as a NATO member will increase the organization's regional and international effectiveness. Although some state that this may cause incompatibilities due to the foreign policy priorities of some member countries, it is anticipated that the ostensibly challenging issues will be resolved through Türkiye's policies and relations with the West. No matter the divergences in the areas of defense,

economy, and security, Türkiye's membership in the SCO is considered a good opportunity for NATO and, in fact, world peace.

Türkiye served as the term president of the organization's Energy Club in 2017 (for the first time, a country other than SCO members was granted the presidency). The club aims to develop dialogue on energy security among member states, update their energy strategies, and increase cooperation opportunities in the field of energy. (15)

President Erdoğan stated at NATO's 75th Anniversary Summit that Türkiye has not given up on its goal of becoming a full member of the SCO, which has grown under the leadership of Russia and China and defended the same view in his interview to Newsweek, giving the message that the SCO is not an alternative to NATO and that Türkiye will not give up on one for the other.

Experts claim that President Erdoğan has frequently brought up the issue of joining the SCO since the early 2010s and has used this discourse to balance his volatile relations with the West, with an emphasis that Türkiye's recent tendency to establish more solid and institutional ties with the East should not be ignored.

The Future of the Organization and Its Contributions to the Region

The SCO benefits the Eurasian region, and member states on certain issues. It is evident that the determination to act together against terrorism, a matter the members are concerned with the most, relieves the weaker members. The main criticism directed at all members is the vague issue of "fighting extremism."

Since the main problems of the region are the lack of infrastructure and transportation, the networks have been expanded. Energy-rich members have started to play a leading role in the development of other members through mutual trade and investments.

While members and states interested in the region aspire for the organization's success, those who believe that their economic and political spheres of influence have been undermined are slandering it for failure.

China is making the most effort for the organization's success. Other members also attach great importance to the organization, especially in

the fight against terrorism, for factors such as economy, energy security, and development. Observer and member countries, on the other hand, hope to benefit from economic and cultural cooperation opportunities in addition to security.

Cooperation in the organization is sometimes hampered by the members' different economic and political systems, foreign policy priorities, interests, and goals. The competition and leadership race, especially between Russia and China, are expected to weaken the harmony and effectiveness of the organization.

The organization's lack of a strong institutional structure causes disruptions in decision-making and implementation processes. While the projects that some members consider significant are hampered by the difficulty in accessing sufficient financing, the fact that there are still trade and investment barriers between members limits economic cooperation. In addition, the lack of complete trust among members in the field of security information and intelligence sharing prevents the fully harmonious operation of the organization.

The effectiveness of the organization also decreases due to military and political problems in the region. The authoritarian and oppressive government methods of some members prevent the organization's liberal discourse. The organization feels under pressure because most of the members have poor human rights records and are subject to serious criticism in the international arena.

The annexation of Kashmir by India and the hostile attitude towards Bangladesh and Pakistan increase tensions in the region. Russia's discriminatory policies in the Caucasus and some autonomous republics damage the integrity of the SCO. On the other hand, dealing with the Taiwan and Hong Kong issues, China is expected to terminate the excessive human rights violations against East Turkestan, respect the lives of the people, and restore their autonomy. It is argued that the SCO's potential success as an organization and international actor highly depends on these three countries' ability to solve their internal problems.

When the organization strengthens its institutional structure, it will accelerate decision-making processes, adapt to regional and global developments, and maintain its prestige as long as serious reforms are imple-

mented. When the minority rights are protected, the obstacles to free trade from China to the Caucasus and from there to Istanbul, Berlin, Paris, London, and Lisbon will be removed. Otherwise, the effectiveness of the SCO is likely to decrease.

Geo-political and geo-economic policies will determine the future status of the organization.

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DEVELOPING 8 (D-8) ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Aslan Balcı

The Origin of D-8

The organization is known as the Developing-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation and is shortly referred to as D-8. Former Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Necmeddin Erbakan proposed the idea of cooperation among developing Islamic countries at the “Cooperation in Development Conference” held in Istanbul in October 1996.

Under the leadership of Erbakan, eight countries came together at the Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Istanbul on June 15, 1997, to improve cooperation among Muslim countries for development and to enrich economic and social relations and established D-8. The members are Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Türkiye. D-8 stands for eight developing countries. D-8 is a global organization rather than a geographically limited or regional organization and was established with the “Istanbul

Declaration.” All of the organization’s members are also members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The members of D-8 stand out within the OIC with their technological and economic development levels, commercial potential, and dense populations.

D-8 aims to present to the world an example of a just administration that is not based on exploitation and carries out activities and projects in many areas, such as industry, energy, agriculture, science, and technology. It aims to strengthen developing economies through these activities.

The international cooperation organization formed by Muslim countries envisages a much more dynamic development compared to its counterparts.

After the unipolar world order established itself, negative implications such as violence, occupation, economic and social attacks, terrorist incidents, and Islamophobia against the Muslim world have pushed Muslim countries to seek to establish a globally effective platform.

The founders defined the organization’s emergence as the manifestation of the establishment of a new world that prioritizes strength and rights over oppression and determined its official languages as Turkish, Arabic, and English. At the sixth summit, it was decided that the permanent headquarters of the organization would be in Istanbul.

Envisioning a peaceful world where there is no oppressor or oppressed, and everyone is given their rights, the organization has six stars on its flag. Each star symbolizes a message:

Peace instead of conflict.

Dialogue instead of confrontation.

Cooperation instead of exploitation.

Justice instead of double standard.

Equality instead of discrimination.

Human rights, freedom and democracy, instead of oppression and domination. (1)

As one of the founders aiming to “increase the welfare and peace of member nations,” our country attaches importance to D-8 and actively participates in its activities. (2)

The Purposes and Objectives of D-8

Based on its six principles, the organization aims to open new horizons and create opportunities in trade relations among the members. It encourages cooperation in areas such as investment, industry, agriculture, energy, transportation, and tourism. The organization was established to provide better living conditions, develop economic cooperation around concrete common projects, and strengthen the positions of its members in the world economy. (3) The eight countries target improved cooperation, primarily in development, by combining their capabilities and aim to take a common stance against exploitation and external attacks.

The organization's objectives include developing joint initiatives to accelerate economic development, increase welfare, and provide free trade agreements and customs facilities by reducing trade barriers between members. Planning to cooperate in science and technology, the organization improves the technological capacities of member states, develops joint projects in education and research, encourages cultural and social cooperation, and organizes cultural exchange programs to strengthen friendship and understanding between peoples. Projects such as supporting sustainable development goals, cooperating in environmental protection, reducing poverty, and ensuring social development are also among its goals.

The objectives of the organization additionally comprise improving the statuses of member states in the global economy, creating different and new opportunities in trade relations, increasing members' participation in decision-making processes at the international level and prioritizing the development of living standards. (4) D-8 aims to help not only its members but also oppressed and exploited countries in the world regardless of religion, language, and nationality.

Founded as a result of Erbakan's efforts, D-8 determined its main goal during its foundational phase as "peace, dialogue, cooperation, justice, equality and democracy" in the first Summit Declaration in 1997. The organization is predicated upon the permanent relations between members in the fields of economy, military, politics, and culture.

Although it was envisaged as an economic organization, Erbakan called D-8 "The New World Project." In his speech in Istanbul on June 20, 2009, Erbakan stated that the eight countries of the organization were the core and that they would come together with the subsequent par-

ticipation of D-60s and D-160s and the 10 global organizations of the New World to save all oppressed people from the exploitation of racist imperialism and to establish a Just World.

Each of the D-8 members has important duties on a sectoral basis. In this context:

Bangladesh; Rural development,

Indonesia; Fight against poverty and human resources,

Iran; Science and technology,

Malaysia; Finance, banking and privatization,

Egypt; Trade,

Nigeria; Energy,

Pakistan; Agriculture and fisheries,

Türkiye; Coordination of the activities in the fields of industry, health and environment.

The founding father of the organization, the late Erbakan, stated that the realities of the 20th century and the lessons to be learned from then were the reason for the birth of D-8 and that the establishment of the organization was actually an objection to and rejection of the colonialism of imperialist countries. Erbakan proposed that D-8 was one of the most important incidents of the 20th century and the most valuable gift of this century to the 21st century, and emphasized that the establishment of D-8 was “like a door opening to light at the end of the 20th century, which was full of wars and conflicts from beginning to end” (5).

The importance of D-8: The fact that it hosts leading economies in the Islamic geography increases the importance of D-8.

D-8 countries follow an open door policy for other developing countries that adopt the organization's principles and goals and aim to increase the number of members to 20. Currently, the organization covers a territory exceeding 7.5 million square meters with a population of approximately 1.2 billion and an economic size approaching 4 trillion dollars. (6) The organization's members import around 600 billion dollars and export around 700 billion dollars, holding 14% of global trade.

The organization sets goals for the near and distant future at each summit. It aims to prepare projects on trade, industry, tourism, agriculture,

food security, energy, establishment of special economic zones, and transportation issues. At the 10th Summit Meeting hosted by Bangladesh on April 8, 2021, the member states accepted the “D-8 Decennial Roadmap 2020-2030” and aimed to increase their domestic trade volumes to a level coinciding to at least 10% of the total D-8 trade by the end of 2030.

In the Dhaka declaration, an invitation was made, “We hereby ... Encourage Member States to ratify and operationalize the Preferential Trade, the Visa and the Customs Agreements as soon as possible in order to promote and ensure substantial cooperation among the Member States in this vital sectoral track of cooperation.” (7)

Speaking at the opening of the Dhaka summit, President Erdoğan said, “If we can pave the way for using our respective national currencies in trade among the D-8 countries, it will revolutionize the organization’s history. There is no need to dissolve our economies under the pressure of exchange rates. Central banks should come together to establish a clearing house.” (8)

D-8’s Organs and Functioning

The organization consists of four principal organs: the Summit, the Council, the Commission, and the Secretariat.

The Summit: The D-8 Summit consists of the Heads of Government or State of the member countries, and it is the highest-level decision-making body of the organization. Its meetings are held every two years, and the members determine the summit venue and time. Members participate in activities and projects voluntarily, and decisions are made based on unanimity.

The Council: It is the body where members are represented at the level of Foreign Minister. Council meetings are held once a year, and ministers from relevant fields also participate if necessary. As the political decision-making body of D-8, the Council is held before the summit meetings and prepares the summit’s work program.

The Commission: It serves as the executive body and is composed of high-level Foreign Ministry bureaucrats of the members. Each delegate here is responsible for the coordination of their own country. The Com-

mission meets twice a year to carry out the organization's coordination work.

The Secretariat: The secretariat of D-8 has UN observer status and is located in Istanbul. It carries out communication, information sharing, meeting and organization arrangements between members.

Established with the great aim of being an alternative to capitalist and socialist economies and targeting being more effective, D-8 may experience disruptions in summit meetings due to some instabilities in member countries and the world.

The organization's summit was first held in Istanbul in 1997, subsequently in Dhaka in March 1999, Cairo in February 2001, Tehran in February 2004, Bali in May 2006, Kuala Lumpur in July 2008, Abuja in July 2010, Islamabad in November 2012, Istanbul in October 2017 and hosted online by Bangladesh on April 8, 2021. (9) Egypt assumed the 11th term presidency in May 2023 and will continue this duty until the end of 2025, when the presidency will be transferred to Indonesia, which will serve as the 12th term presidency until 2028.

There is no prerequisite for becoming a member of the organization. In granting membership, factors such as the development status of the candidate country, its geopolitical position, population, and resources are taken into consideration. However, no new members have been accepted since the establishment of the organization. (10)

For the first time since its establishment, D-8 granted membership in the meeting on 19 December 2024 in Cairo, and Azerbaijan became a member, increasing the number of members to nine.

On What Foundations Was D-8 Established?

D-8 is a dynamic establishment and a global organization founded with the idea of embracing developing countries and all oppressed peoples in the world.

The late Erdogan, the founding father of the organization that brought together eight developing Islamic countries, stated, "The current global exploitation system has collapsed. No one can claim that this world is based on just foundations. Although all people are created equal, it is very clear that they are not equal when it comes to the distribution of blessings." (11)

Most of the organizations established by imperialists are aimed at exploiting and alienating others. D-8 emerged with an ambitious project, proposing that it could bring prosperity and peace to all humanity. Emerging as an alternative to the global system, D-8 was targeted from the very beginning. If the founding members had genuinely believed in the purpose and objective of the organization, this project could have reached its target. However, some countries reluctantly became members of D-8 because they could not oppose Erbakan and were afraid of domestic reaction. Such leaders and those who followed them could not carry the organization to the top.

Stating that D-8 was founded on the idea of labor and justice, Erbakan said the following at the conference organized by ESAM on June 20, 2009: "Throughout history, civilizations that prioritize rights and civilizations that prioritize brute force came one after another. The first category is the civilization that has the true understanding of rights that the prophets taught people. The foundations of this civilization are human rights, labor, mutual consent and justice. In the rights understanding of the pharaohs who relied on brute force, there was force, majority, privilege and interest. When the pharaohs oppressed people, they did not say 'We oppress you.' They said 'It is your duty to do these things and our right', considering force and interest as the source for right. This is where oppression stems from." (12)

In order to prevent the members' dependence on foreign resources, D-8 made a major heavy industry move. According to the project, the members would produce their own vehicles by collaboration. Many venues were determined, such as civil helicopters, production of natural gas and oil drilling equipment, and renewable solar and wind energy projects to meet the energy needs of countries. Projects such as ship production for the transportation and storage of natural gas were prepared in theory and presented to members. Although labor division for the production of particular parts were determined, the implementation phase could not be realized.

Has D-8 Achieved Its Goal?

There are some internal and external factors that hinder the organization's potential to achieve its goals. These difficulties and criticisms limit the organization's activities and cooperation. The fact that the organi-

zation includes members with different economic and administrative structures makes it difficult to coordinate joint projects and cooperation initiatives. Differences in political systems and ideological approaches among the members create difficulties in achieving harmony.

The removal of the Erbakan government in Türkiye with a post-modern coup on February 28, 1997, caused the suspension of the D-8 project. Erbakan's successors, such as Bülent Ecevit, Süleyman Demirel, and Mesut Yılmaz, did not contribute to the development of the D-8. The USA, the IMF, and those who control global capital continued to impose on the members and the world the idea that the D-8 should definitely be abolished. It was known that the Hosni Mubarak administration in Egypt joined the organization reluctantly; thus, the February 28 intervention also worked to the Mubarak government's advantage, and it decreased its interest in the organization. In other countries, governments were rendered ineffective by coups and political games similar to those in Türkiye.

When the members' relations with different blocs clashed with the D-8, compatibility became an issue. Some D-8 countries were pressured by Western imperialist powers. This pressure negatively affected cooperation and projects within the D-8. The organization's lack of sanctioning power and its limited institutional structure and capacity made it difficult to implement projects.

The fact that D-8, which was established with a perception of a new world order, has not been able to implement concrete and large-scale projects to date has led to criticisms about the organization's effectiveness. As a project to benefit all humanity, the organization has not been able to put its goals into practice. Such criticisms have led the Islamic countries and external actors to be less interested in the organization. Above all, when the founders' interest decreased, others did not give the organization any credit either.

The fact that the decision-making processes were slow and stuck in bureaucratic obstacles made it difficult to implement cooperation and projects. The equivalent organizations have made progress because they have overcome these problems. Although the secretariat conducts coordination among the members, it cannot be deemed successful. The bureaucrats in the Commission have not been able to implement life-saving projects by exhibiting the old status quoist attitude.

However, despite these negative realities, D-8 still has the potential to achieve cooperation and development goals and strengthen cooperation among the members. In order to make the shrinking economic markets more efficient, interactions regarding raw material, industry, economy, trade, and most importantly, free trade agreements and customs facilities among the members might be of use. Interaction between the members should be increased through investments, economic development, and cultural exchange programs. Experts emphasize that such viable projects that will eliminate exploitation should continue.

A joint combat team should be established against increasing Islamophobia, terror, cyber security, energy, and narcotics smuggling. Such a negative situation can affect both the members and the region in which they are located. No organization that chooses to be inactive can be successful; eventually, it will be criticized, and its recognition around the globe will decrease. The parties should put aside the political conflicts between them and external pressures and demonstrate a serious will to implement previous projects for their interests.

The future of the D-8 will be shaped by how these scenarios will unfold and how the member countries will cope with these challenges. Strong cooperation among the members, institutional reforms, and strategic planning are becoming increasingly important in order to improve the effectiveness of the organization and achieve positive results.

President Erdoğan spoke about the status of the D-8 on April 8, 2021, as follows: “This organization was founded on truly sublime values such as peace instead of war, justice, and development instead of double standards, sharing instead of exploitation, and human rights, freedom and democracy instead of oppression and domination. The world’s need for these values is so obvious that it leaves no room for debate. We will continue to make every effort to strengthen the D-8.” (13)

The D-8 members are going through a difficult period due to the fight against high inflation, high exchange and interest rates. Investment, production, employment, and export appear to be the factors that could relieve the D-8 members. In order to get the D-8 back on track, leaders need to mobilize the organization. The future of the organization will depend on how these challenges are dealt with and the members’ will to cooperate.

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REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

THE CRISIS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Prof. Dr. Yılmaz ÇATAL & Salman SAUD

Introduction

The inefficient operation of the first atmospheric steam engines and the subsequent invention of the steam-powered condenser by James Watt in Scotland in 1763 emerged as the driving force of Industry 1.0, i.e., the Industrial Age. The beginning of the Industry 1.0 marked new inventions in 18th and 19th-century Europe. With these inventions' impact on production, a swift supply arose for the design of steam-powered machines. Mechanization has brought about the mechanized industry in every field. Following the United Kingdom, Industry 1.0 affected all of Europe. It spread outside Europe to North America and Japan. Such rapid industrialization and production resulted in more demand for energy.

Although the energy requirement was initially met by wood, the use of coal and oil became more accepted as fossil fuels

had more calories. Thus, fossil fuels became a vital energy source. Fossil fuels bind carbon in their structure, releasing CO₂ and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere with combustion. As greenhouse gases were released into the atmosphere all the more, a structure wrapping the earth's atmosphere like a blanket formed, increasing the temperature by retaining the sun's rays in the atmosphere.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), drew attention to an important finding in its fifth assessment report published in 2013. The report clearly stated, citing scientific data, that "Climate change is unequivocal and caused by human activities." The changes in climate may sometimes be explained by natural factors such as solar activity, the rotation of the Earth around itself and the Sun, and major volcanic activities on the surface of the Earth. However, the main cause of climate change through greenhouse gas emissions is humans.

Climate change refers to changes in temperatures and weather events over long periods and the increase in the frequency of extreme or sudden weather events. As it has become clear that climate problems require urgent intervention in recent years, the term "climate crisis" has become more frequently used instead of "climate change." This change in rhetoric aims both in the scientific community and in the media to draw attention to the rapid deterioration of the climate. In recent years, South Asian countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have been facing various climate problems and are highly fragile in the face of climate change due to their coastal and drought-prone regions. Changing precipitation patterns, increasing temperatures, and rising CO₂ levels in these countries have been observed to negatively affect usable water, food security, and public health (Afzal et al., 2023; Behara et al., 2024). This study is conducted on a country-by-country basis due to the geographical, climatic, and socio-economic differences among the countries in the region, which cause the effects of climate change to be felt with varying intensities. Factors such as temperature increase, irregular rainfall, droughts, floods, and glacial melting threaten food security, usable water resources, public health, and livelihoods. Thus, this study also includes an anal-

ysis of emergency measures to be taken against climate change on a country basis.

The Impact of Climate Change on Afghanistan

Afghanistan has historically struggled with difficult geographical conditions and socio-political challenges, and climate change has negatively impacted it, especially regarding water resources, agriculture, and food security. Annual average temperatures have been observed to increase in the country, and this trend has accelerated particularly since the 1990s (Akhundzadah et al., 2020). Due to climate change, rainfall has become irregular, and droughts have become more frequent, especially in southern and eastern Afghanistan, deepening water scarcity (Sultani et al., 2021). The severe drought experienced in 2018 affected 2.2 million people and caused major losses in agriculture, which constitutes approximately 30% of the national income.

Water resources in Afghanistan, such as rivers, mountains, and groundwater reserves, are also threatened by climate change. The water levels of the Amu Darya and Helmand rivers in particular, have fallen, affecting the production of wheat, corn, and fruit, which require high irrigation. In the 2000s, drought in the country's southeast devastated the agricultural sector and forced millions of people to migrate. The 2011 drought affected approximately 3 million people and led to a major food crisis. Another substantial impact of climate change in Afghanistan is the increased extreme weather events. The major flood disaster in 2015 caused the death of more than 2,000 people, impaired infrastructure, and caused agricultural damage. Such disasters, combined with the country's inadequate infrastructure, have made life even more difficult for the people.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in Afghanistan

Measures to be taken against the effects of climate change in Afghanistan must include both adaptation and mitigation strategies. An effective water management system must be established against drought and water scarcity. Thus, monitoring groundwater levels, modernizing traditional irrigation systems to increase the efficient use of water, and

expanding rainwater harvesting systems in the country will improve access to water.

Agriculture is one of the sectors most affected by climate change. It is necessary to adopt agricultural techniques suitable for new climate conditions, use resistant seeds, and develop water-efficient technologies. In the face of increasing extreme weather events, installing early warning systems would minimize damages, warning the public against disasters such as floods and droughts. Afghanistan, which has a low income level, should participate in global climate change efforts and benefit from the funds spared for the fight against climate change. Such financial aid is vital in the implementation of adaptation strategies.

The Impact of Climate Change on Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the most densely populated country in South Asia as well as it has the lowest altitude above sea level in the region, thus, it experiences large-scale migration due to rising sea levels. Agricultural and living spaces perish due to rising sea levels. The country is located in a delta formed by the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, and its population, especially those living in low-lying coastal areas, is in great danger, and it is estimated that 17 million people may be displaced by 2100 in the country (Huq et al., 2006). Bangladesh is a country frequently affected by tropical storms arriving from the oceans. The increase in sea water temperatures due to global warming causes tropical storms to become more severe. Studies conducted after the Great Typhoon in 1991 show that the severity of such storms will increase in the future (Khan et al., 2015). Rainfall has become more intense and has caused floods, especially since the early 2000s. These flood disasters claim lives and seriously damage the country's infrastructure. The annual losses in Bangladesh's agricultural production may reportedly rise up to 10% in a short time due to climate events (Fowler and Hennessy, 2007), which threatens food security and reduces the living standards of the local people.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in Bangladesh

To mitigate the effects of climate change and prepare for these threats

that Bangladesh faces, national planning, infrastructure improvements, and public education are crucial. Bangladesh should strengthen early warning systems against disasters like floods and storms. Resilient structures, especially in coastal areas, should be capable of reducing the effects of storms and sea level rise. In addition, infrastructure investments such as water management systems and flood drainage for agricultural areas will help preserve agricultural terrain and sustain production.

Providing social adaptation requires educating local people about climate change. In addition, a more climate-resilient agricultural sector can be created by ensuring that local people adapt to sustainable farming techniques. Bangladesh should focus on international cooperation in combating climate change and seek financial support from developed countries. Agreements with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other international organizations will ensure that Bangladesh is less affected by this process.

The Impact of Climate Change on Bhutan

Bhutan is a small mountainous country located in the Himalayas in the east of South Asia, and its population, which primarily depends on agriculture and livestock, is seriously affected by droughts and irregular rainfall induced by the increase in temperature. The glaciers in the Himalayan region will reportedly melt by 30% by 2050, threatening river flows, agricultural irrigation and drinkable water supply (Khadka et al., 2014). The Pho Chhu and Wang Chhu, the main rivers fed by the glaciers in Bhutan, are likely to create a major water crisis for the country as the glaciers melt down. The increasing number of floods in Bhutan in recent years has posed a significant threat to the ecosystems in the region. The temperature in Bhutan is expected to increase by another 1.5°C by 2030, which will negatively affect agricultural productivity (Bhutan National Environment Commission, 2018). One of the most essential food crops in the country – rice – has decreased significantly, and there have been considerable yield losses in agricultural areas (Khadka et al., 2014). Moreover, Bhutan's forests are observably becoming more susceptible to fires due to climate change, and these fires are causing great damage to ecosystems.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in Bhutan

Bhutan has developed various strategies to combat climate change. The country is one of the few countries that is defined as “carbon negative,” meaning that it absorbs more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere through its forests than it releases. Bhutan should develop infrastructure projects to make rivers more resilient to floods. Local water storage systems need to be strengthened to reduce the impact of glacial melt on water resources. Significant steps to be taken in this regard include making the agricultural sector more resilient to climate change, encouraging climate-appropriate agricultural varieties, and introducing water-efficient technologies. Bhutan has been successful in balancing carbon emissions by protecting its forests. However, this strategy should persist in the face of the adverse effects of global warming. Tighter controls should be implemented to combat threats such as forest fires and excessive cutting. Equally important is the need for a community-level movement by raising public awareness in the fight against climate change in Bhutan. Education programs on climate change can raise local people’s awareness about environmental impacts and encourage sustainable agricultural practices.

The Impact of Climate Change on India

Climate change’s impact on India involves several factors, such as temperature increase, changes in rainfall patterns, sea level rise, and extreme weather events. A 2019 study showed that the temperature increase in India is slightly higher than the global average, negatively affecting agricultural productivity. For example, wheat production has decreased in the northern parts of India due to temperature increases. Changes in precipitation regime are also an essential factor. Monsoon rainfall in southeastern India has become irregular in recent years. Between 2000 and 2019, India’s monsoon rainfall decreased by an annual average of 6% (Srinivasan, 2020).

During the 2001 drought in India, wheat production decreased by 10 to 20%. In addition, the severe heat wave in 2014-2015 claimed the lives of approximately 2,300 people. In 2013, the Uttarakhand disaster of flash floods and landslides caused the death of thousands of people and

millions of dollars worth of losses in the northern Indian state. Studies show that the increased amount of rainfall that triggered this disaster was due to climate change. India's wheat and rice production is at risk due to the decrease in water resources. According to the United Nations (UNFCCC), agricultural production is expected to decrease by 2.5% to 12.6% by 2050. The coastal areas of southeastern India are at risk of inundation due to rising sea levels. By 2100, 150 million people in coastal regions of India are expected to be affected by floods (Dasgupta et al., 2015), which may create significant displacements, habitat loss, and social unrest.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in India

The first step to mitigating the impact of climate change on India is to implement effective policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. India is a party to the Paris Agreement and aims to reduce its emissions by 33-35% by 2030. However, to achieve these goals, India needs to make more use of renewable energy sources; for instance, it has excellent solar energy potential. Apart from this, there should also be improvements in water management and agricultural policies. India's food security may be ensured by using water efficiently, modernizing irrigation systems, and promoting drought-resistant farming techniques. Furthermore, establishing early warning systems to adapt to climate change will minimize the impacts of disasters. Finally, coastal areas in India should take protective measures against rising sea levels. Coastal areas should have limited construction and must include infrastructure that will prevent rising water levels.

The Impact of Climate Change on the Maldives

The Maldives is an island state consisting of 26 atolls and 1,192 coral islands located in the Indian Ocean. With an elevation of only a few meters above sea level, this country is considered one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world. The biggest threat to these islands is the rise in sea level, so much so that the Maldives is at risk of being submerged even if the average sea level rises by just 1 meter. According to a report published by the United Nations Environment Program

(UNEP) in 2019, sea levels worldwide have risen by approximately 15 cm from 1900 to 2018, and the Maldives is directly affected by this rise. Scientific studies concur that sea levels in the Maldives are rising by approximately 3.4 mm per year. This rate is rising faster than the rest of the world (Church et al., 2013). In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Maldives was hit by climate-related disasters such as severe tropical storms, sea level rise, and coastal erosion. Rising sea temperatures have damaged the Maldives' coral reefs, with a major coral bleaching event in 1998 killing nearly 90% of the country's coral reefs and causing significant damage to both the ecosystem and tourism.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in the Maldives

The Maldives puts its efforts into developing several strategies against climate change. However, the effectiveness of these measures depends on international support and global climate policies. The Maldivian government is implementing a series of policies based on the goals of "climate change adaptation" and "zero emissions" to safeguard the country's future. The country is also developing engineering solutions such as raising the island floors, reinforcing the coasts, and building breakwater structures. For example, Hulhumalé Island has been artificially raised for its protection against sea level rise. Tourism is the fundamental sector of the Maldivian economy, but it is negatively affected by climate change. The country is trying to promote sustainable tourism by preserving the ecological balance. Coral reef protection projects are also given priority. Since the early 2000s, the Maldivian government and international environmental organizations have implemented a series of projects to restore coral reefs and protect marine ecosystems.

The Maldives actively participate in international efforts to combat global climate change. At the Bali Climate Conference, it advocated for reducing carbon emissions and limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. In the Paris Agreement, the Maldives urged countries worldwide to take greater responsibility in addressing climate change. The Maldives is also investing in renewable energy to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels, promoting the use of clean energy sources such as solar power.

The Impact of Climate Change on Nepal

Nepal is a country extending particularly to the Himalayan Region, where the highest mountains in the world are located. Temperature increases in Nepal are occurring at a rate faster than the global average. The average temperature in Nepal has increased by 0.6°C in the last 40 years, and this increase is especially noticeable in the Himalayan Region (Shrestha et al., 2011). Since the 1950s, 21% of the Himalayan glaciers have melted, bringing about problems such as river floods, water shortages, and irrigation problems. Nepal has a predominantly agricultural economy, and climate change has caused considerable declines in rice and corn production. 60% of farmers in Nepal have reportedly lower yields due to climate change (Nepal Climate Change Risk Management, 2016). Irregular snowfalls in the Himalayan region increase mountaineering risks, while the growing threat of overflowing glacial lakes poses the risk of major floods that could devastate villages and infrastructure. In 2014, a major flood disaster occurred in the Solu Khumbu region of northern Nepal due to the overflow of glacial lakes (Nepal Ministry of Environment, 2014).

Rising temperatures accelerate the multiplication of microorganisms in water resources, increasing the spread of waterborne diseases. The 2008 drought caused widespread water scarcity, significantly reducing water resources across the country. Additionally, floods and landslides triggered by the 2015 earthquake in Nepal highlighted the severe impact of climate change-induced natural disasters, which have devastated local communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems, with recovery efforts taking many years.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in Nepal

To mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, Nepal must prioritize strengthening international cooperation on water resource management and glacial melt control. Collaborating with neighboring countries like India and China on water sharing and river management is essential. Expanding climate-smart farming practices is a must in the agricultural sector, and it is crucial to develop resilient crop varieties suited to local climatic conditions, improve irrigation systems, and

educate farmers about climate change. Additionally, establishing early warning systems and providing disaster preparedness training for local communities are vital. At the national level, Nepal should implement robust climate policies and promote environmental awareness to enhance its resilience to climate change and achieve sustainable development goals.

The Impact of Climate Change on Pakistan

Pakistan's geography is dominated by deserts, semi-deserts, and mountainous regions, which amplifies climate change's effects. Since the early 21st century, the impact of climate change in Pakistan has manifested in more frequent and severe heat waves, floods caused by increased rainfall, prolonged droughts, and melting mountain glaciers. A 2015 study reported a temperature rise of approximately 0.5°C in Pakistan between 1950 and 2010, with the most significant increases occurring during the summer months (Nafees et al., 2024). In addition, Pakistan's irrigation systems and agricultural infrastructure rely heavily on glacier-fed water resources, which are now under threat due to accelerated glacial melting.

The 2010 and 2022 floods caused severe devastation in the southern regions of Sindh, Balochistan, and Punjab, displacing millions of people. These floods were triggered by sudden snowmelt and excessive rainfall in the Hindu Kush and Karakoram mountains. The 2015 drought highlighted another dimension of climate change's impact, significantly reducing agricultural production, mainly wheat and rice yields. A 2019 study found that rising temperatures in southeastern Pakistan's agrarian regions have reduced crop yields by 25% (Ali et al., 2021). This decline threatens food security and adversely affects the country's economy and employment structure.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in Pakistan

To effectively combat climate change in Pakistan, comprehensive reforms in water management must be prioritized. One of the most significant impacts of climate change is the depletion of water resources. Therefore, saving water, improving irrigation methods, and protecting groundwater resources are essential to promote sustainable agriculture. In addi-

tion, the agricultural sector needs to focus on growing climate-resistant crops. Advances in genetic engineering and agricultural technologies make it possible to produce such resistant crops. Furthermore, establishing early warning systems is of great importance in informing the public about sudden weather events and disaster preparedness.

Pakistan has significant potential for solar and wind energy, and harnessing these renewable resources would reduce dependency on fossil fuels and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, implementing eco-friendly infrastructure projects and sustainable urban planning are necessary as they will improve air quality, particularly in cities, while promoting the development of climate-resilient structures.

The Impact of Climate Change on Sri Lanka

Between 1950 and 2010, Sri Lanka's annual average temperature increased by 0.8°C, while climate change has also altered precipitation patterns. While precipitation has increased in the western and southern parts of the country, droughts have become more frequent in the northern and eastern parts, which increases the pressure on agriculture and water resources. The severe drought in Sri Lanka in 2016 caused a water and food crisis for approximately 1.2 million people. A 1-meter sea level rise in Sri Lanka is predicted to affect approximately 1.2 million people and result in the loss of 500 km² of agricultural land (Haigh et al., 2014). In addition, severe floods in 2010 and 2011 caused great damage in the western and southern parts of the country, destroying hundreds of buildings and damaging agricultural lands. 70% of the coral reefs on the west coast of Sri Lanka have been damaged due to climate change (Nianthi et al., 2015). The major flood disaster in 2017 claimed the lives of more than 200 deaths and caused more than 500,000 people to become homeless (Disaster Management Center, 2017). Moreover, hurricanes and tropical storms have become more frequent in different parts of the country. These disasters result in casualties and increasing economic losses.

The Measures to be Taken against Climate Change in Sri Lanka

It is vital for Sri Lanka to establish early warning systems for natural disasters and raise public awareness about risks such as floods, storms,

and cyclones to cope with the effects of climate change. Sustainable agricultural practices should also be expanded to prevent a decline in productivity due to climate change. This can be achieved using crop varieties suited to local climatic conditions and developing effective water management strategies.

Coastal protection projects should be implemented for Sri Lanka's coastal areas to combat sea level rise, which is crucial for preventing erosion and safeguarding settlements. Sri Lanka should collaborate with the international community to address climate change, secure financial support, and facilitate technology transfer. Protecting natural resources, preserving biodiversity, and enhancing ecosystems will strengthen the country's resilience to climate change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Industrialized countries and developed economies are the main contributors to climate change, responsible for a significant portion of carbon dioxide and methane emissions. According to the International Environment Program (IPCC-2021) reports, only 20 countries account for more than 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions. China leads with its rapid industrialization and coal-based energy production, contributing 28% of global CO₂ emissions. The USA follows, with fossil fuel-based energy production, high emissions from the transportation sector, and industrial activities, accounting for approximately 15% of global emissions. India ranks third, contributing 7% of global emissions due to its large population and reliance on coal-fired power plants. Other significant emission sources include Russia, Japan, and the European Union, together accounting for 6% of global emissions.

South Asia comprises countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, and despite having low emissions, these countries are experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change. Consequences of rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, melting glaciers, and the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events and rising sea levels are all visible impacts of climate change in the region. These climate-related changes pose significant threats to food security, water resources, public health, and regional economic stability, deepening existing vulnerabilities.

Developed countries must take responsibility not only for reducing their own emissions but also for ensuring a just climate transition for poorer and more vulnerable regions. This involves providing financial assistance and establishing fair policies that allow affected communities to participate in reconstruction efforts. As addressing climate change will require significant costs, the United Nations must support more climate-friendly and environmental projects in these regions. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Climate Agreement both stress that developed countries bear a greater responsibility for climate action. The Paris Agreement aims to limit global warming to 1.5°C by 2030, with developed nations committing to provide financial and technical support to developing countries. According to the 2009 Copenhagen Agreement, developed countries pledged \$100 billion annually in financial support for developing nations by 2020, a target that remains unmet.

Climate-sensitive monitoring systems must be established to clearly document the existence and severity of climate change in the region. These systems should include climatological data and phenological and disaster records to capture the impacts of climate change fully. In response to climate vulnerabilities, South Asian countries are developing adaptation strategies, such as crop diversification, flood-resistant infrastructure, water conservation practices, and early warning systems. However, these measures are often limited and require broader institutional support and international collaboration. Climate-smart agricultural practices, regional water management agreements, and community-based adaptation efforts are crucial to enhance resilience. Mitigation actions, such as the transition to renewable energy, are also essential to limit future climate impacts. Given the region's vulnerabilities, comprehensive contingency plans are necessary for sustainable development, safeguarding livelihoods, protecting health, and preserving ecosystems.

Climate action demands substantial financial investment from both governments and enterprises. The cost of inaction in the face of the climate crisis is far higher. Therefore, it is essential for developed countries to contribute to the climate adaptation efforts of developing nations and support their transition to a green economy. Additionally, effective coordination and management among South Asian countries are crucial to achieving successful outcomes in this process.

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HISTORICAL PROCESS AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE WATER DISPUTE BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Suhaib Rahman GHAFARY

Introduction

Water is the foundation and source of development, and the world's first societies and later great civilizations emerged along the banks and beds of major rivers such as the Nile, Huang, Tigris, Euphrates, Harirud, Hirmand, and Amu. Despite covering two-thirds of the Earth's surface, fresh and accessible water resources remain limited and unevenly distributed, so much so that 80% of the world's population has access to only 20% of the world's freshwater resources.

As a landlocked country, Afghanistan shares multiple river basins with its neighbors and has five major river basins, four of which are transboundary, accounting for approximately 90% of the country's total water resources. International cooperation with neighboring countries is crucial to meet the increasing water, energy, and food security needs. Therefore, unilat-

eral resource exploitation and the construction of dams and canals can lead to potential conflicts with downstream neighbors. Cooperation with Pakistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan is of particular importance.

Pakistan and Afghanistan share nine rivers with an annual flow of approximately 18.3 million acre-feet, and the Kabul River alone accounts for 16.5 acre-feet of this amount. This river is shared between Afghanistan, located in the upper basin, and Pakistan, positioned in the lower basin (Frontier Post, 2013).

Building dams is an integral part of Afghanistan's 2008 development agenda (Kugelman, Alam & Bakhshi, 2011). Therefore, Afghanistan is constructing 12 dams on the Kabul River at various points within its territorial boundaries with Indian financial assistance. These dams will have a total storage capacity of 4.7 million acre-feet.

Pakistan's concern is that such dams could potentially cut off water flow to the Indus River in Afghanistan by retaining water during the cropping season and releasing it during the rainy season. If unresolved, this could adversely affect Pakistan's agriculture and hydroelectric power generation, particularly in the three major districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, namely Peshawar, Charsadda, and Nowshera.

On the other hand, Pakistan is planning to divert the Chitral River (known as Kunar in Afghanistan) to the Panjkora River during the summer months. The Chitral River originates in Pakistan and flows into Afghanistan as the Kunar River, joining the Kabul River near Jalalabad to flow back into Pakistan. This diversion aims to irrigate the Dir District and reduce the risk of floods caused by the Kabul River in the Charsadda and Nowshera districts. If Pakistan diverts the Chitral River, its main feeder, it will negatively impact Afghanistan (Gandapur Fateh, 2011).

Therefore, the key question is whether the pressures of the downstream countries, when dams and other water management mechanisms threaten their food security, environment, and socio-economic status, will heighten the risk of conflict with the upstream countries in the region.

This study examines the transboundary waters between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the history and current status of the disputes between the two countries by analyzing diverse sources.

Water Resources of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Their Geographical Distribution and Importance

Afghanistan and Pakistan share at least nine common rivers, and the Kabul River is one of the most significant of them, flowing from Afghanistan into Pakistan's Sindh River. The northern part of the Kabul Basin covers 11% of Afghanistan's land area and supplies 26% of the country's water (Center for Afghanistan Studies, 2020). Meanwhile, the southern part of the Kabul Basin is located in Pakistan and constitutes approximately 1% of Pakistan's land area, meeting 10% to 17% of the country's surface water needs and contributing 12% of the annual water flow to the Sindh Basin (Tariq and Van De Green, 2012).

Stretching 700 kilometers, the Kabul River is an international river located in eastern Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan. It originates in Afghanistan's Hindu Kush Mountains and flows into the Indus River near Attock, Pakistan. Its basin spans approximately 67,000 square kilometers, with 53,000 square kilometers (79%) located in Afghanistan and 14,000 square kilometers (21%) in Pakistan (Rasooli and Kang, 2015). The Kabul River basin is divided into eight sub-basins based on hydro, climatic, and physiographic characteristics: Logar, Ghurband, Panjshir, Laghman, Kunar, Kabul, Middle Kabul, Lower Kabul, as well as Gomal and Kurram (Shroder and Ahmadzai, 2016).

Another main tributary of the basin is the Chitral River, which provides approximately 29% of the total water in the Kabul basin with an annual flow of 8.65 billion cubic meters (WAPDA, 2013). Originating in Pakistan, the Chitral River becomes the Kunar River upon entering Afghanistan, accounting for 12% of the country's total water resources (Ullah and Zulfiqar, 2017). This river is located in both the upper and lower basins of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Pakistan has sometimes used its position in the upper basin on this tributary as a tool to put pressure on Afghanistan and prevent the development of water projects by threatening to divert water and construct dam projects.

The Water Dispute Between Afghanistan and Pakistan

The disputes between the two riparian countries over the management of the Kabul Basin water appear not to be limited to technical issues but rather to be part of a wider spectrum of disagreements on economic, historical, geographical, and political issues. All these intertwined dimensions need to be taken into account in order to understand the disputes over this river and its origins properly.

The hydro-political structure of the Kabul River is greatly affected by the water use sharing between the two riparian countries and their dependence on the river. Pakistan has 239 billion cubic meters of renewable water resources annually, and Afghanistan has 55.7 billion cubic meters.

Pakistan has one of the largest irrigation networks in the world, and 90% of the country's agricultural land is cultivated by irrigation. This irrigation practice accounts for 19.5% of Pakistan's gross national product, employs 42% of the workforce, and provides 64% of export revenues. In addition, this sector constitutes the livelihood for 62% of the population in the country's agriculture-based economy (Qureshi and Ashraf, 2019).

As of 2017, Afghanistan's agricultural sector accounted for 23% of the country's gross national product and 61% of the workforce. The country's rural population accounts for 70% of its total population and depends on this sector for their livelihood. Only 12% of Afghanistan's 652,000 square kilometers of total land is arable (Muradi and Boz, 2018). The World Bank reported that the country's irrigated agricultural area was 6.5% of its total arable land in 2017.

Analyzing the hydro-political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan requires understanding their history of bilateral relations. The onset of certain historical disagreements between these two countries dates back to the period before Pakistan's foundation in 1947. This period marks the efforts by Britain, dwelling in East India, to create a buffer zone on the borders of northwestern India in order to protect itself from the Soviet Union and to partially reduce the Soviet threat by granting autonomy to the Pashtun tribes in those regions.

The British policy towards Afghanistan, throughout its presence in India, oscillated between the defensive policy of closed borders (withdrawing to the banks of the Sindh River) and the aggressive policy of

incorporating the Pashtun tribes into the Empire. However, in 1893, the Durand Line was finally established as a strategic step that designated this region's colonial borders with Afghanistan (Omrani, 2009).

The historical Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan has also had a significant impact on Pakistani-Afghan relations. Pakistan considered India's presence in Afghanistan as an opportune moment for India to advance its border with northern Pakistan further, and Afghanistan accused Pakistan of supporting the Taliban to be used in the conflict over Kashmir (Abbas, 2014). The common enemy of India and Afghanistan brought them closer, leading to the signing of a friendship pact in the 1950s.

The effort to build 12 dams with a storage capacity of 5.8 billion cubic meters on the tributaries of the Kabul River during the former government of Afghanistan (Ashraf Ghani administration) has also been an important issue that complicated the relations between these two countries (Ebrahim, 2017).

All the above-mentioned issues indicate that the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been shaped by the political and territorial disputes between them on the one hand and the interventions of foreign countries such as the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, the United States, India and the Arab countries in historical processes on the other. Therefore, it is possible to argue that hydro-political issues and water relations between the two countries cannot be thoroughly analyzed and evaluated without understanding the historical and political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In retrospect, the water dispute and cooperation between the two countries on the Kabul River dates back to 1921 and 1933. The two agreements between the British Empire and the Afghan government at that time did not have any practical meaning or implementation after the end of the British Empire and the foundation of Pakistan. More than 50 years after the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, the year 2003 marked Pakistan's efforts to initiate bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan on the Kabul River, but no significant progress was made until 2013 (Atefa et al., 2019).

Between 2003 and 2013, there was no significant progress towards establishing a cooperation mechanism for transboundary waters. Howev-

er, in August 2013, the finance ministers of both countries discussed the possibility of constructing a 1,500 MW capacity joint hydropower plant on the Kunar River, a major tributary of the Kabul River, and agreed on the principle of benefit sharing. This agreement also included a decision to go forward with establishing the Kabul River Basin Management Commission (J. Vick, 2014).

This idea was taken to the next level in 2015 when representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China met to develop the concept further. However, no concrete results have yet been achieved due to the conflict in Afghanistan and political tensions between the two countries. For over four years, the United States and the World Bank have encouraged Pakistan and Afghanistan to establish an institutional framework for the beneficial sharing of their shared water resources. To support this effort, the World Bank has provided financial assistance and services to help both countries manage these resources under a bilateral agreement similar to the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty between Pakistan and India.

However, despite these efforts, progress has remained elusive due to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and persistent political tensions between the two countries.

Conclusion

The research results indicate that the disputes between the two riparian countries on the management of the Kabul Basin water are not limited to technical issues but are also part of a broader spectrum of disagreements on economic, geographical, and political issues. They also emphasize that all these intertwined dimensions should be taken into account in order to properly understand the disputes over this river and their root causes.

The Kabul River is a common property of both countries, and they reserve the right to use this resource for economic development. However, no country has the right to cause the degradation of this resource. Therefore, both countries are advised to cooperate in protecting and preserving the Kabul River, focusing primarily on economic and ecological activities related to it, such as fishing, ecotourism, recreation, and watershed management.

The fact that both countries depend on agriculture-based economies further increases the importance of water for them. Afghanistan requires further development to provide both energy security and food security, while Pakistan relies on water resources from the Kabul Basin in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to maintain its current status. While the upper basin country plans to build water storage structures to support its development, the downstream country, despite having developed irrigation networks, puts its efforts only to prevent such developments in the upper basin country.

International water disputes often take a long time to resolve. For example, water agreements on the Indus, Ganges, and Jordan rivers took 10, 30, and 40 years respectively. Therefore, there are no shortcuts in the proposed solution for the Kabul River Agreement, given the political, institutional, and hydrological complexities involved. Sustainable water resources management within national borders is primarily a technical and institutional issue. However, when water resources cross national borders, technical solutions alone are insufficient, and hydro-political aspects also need to be addressed effectively.

Governments and states have sought solutions to the water problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan at different periods. Still, despite these efforts, no concrete results have been achieved due to the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and political tensions between the two countries.

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HISTORICAL PROCESS AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE WATER DISPUTE BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN

Sayed Sulaiman NABIL

Introduction

The water dispute between Afghanistan and Iran is an issue that has repeatedly strained the relations of the two countries. The water-related tension between the two countries has arisen from disagreements over the sharing of transboundary water resources, a matter exacerbated by the harsh environmental conditions of the region. The center of this problem is the Helmand River, which originates in western Afghanistan and feeds Iranian deserts.

Historically, the disputes over the Helmand River emerged in the 19th century and have gradually escalated due to the increasing need for water induced by climate change. Understanding the roots of this issue requires accounting for the water needs of both countries, the historical background of the policies implemented, and the current regional dynamics. Af-

ter all, the impact of disputes between the two countries extends beyond their borders, affecting the entire region.

A general framework is presented in this article by addressing the past, present, and future of the water dispute between Afghanistan and Iran.

The Strategic Significance of the Helmand River and Water Resources

Originating in Afghanistan, the Helmand River is one of the most critical water resources shared by Afghanistan and Iran. As one of the largest rivers in the region, spanning approximately 1,150 kilometers, the Helmand has shaped regional policies for centuries due to both its geographical location and strategic importance (Khalili, Hashemi, 2016:37-38). The Helmand Basin is one of the largest basins in Afghanistan, with a surface area of 262,341 square kilometers, constituting 40% of Afghanistan's surface area and 17% of its water reserves. This river originates from Afghanistan's Baba Mountain, Paghman Mountain, Behood of Maidan Wardak, Panjab, and Daikundi, extends towards Iran, forming a 35 km common water border between the two countries, and finally flows into Hamun Saberi and Hamun Puzak in Sistan (Fahim, 2016: 19-21). Thus, it irrigates a large area and plays a vital role in local agriculture and animal husbandry.

One of the main reasons why the Helmand River is so crucial for Afghanistan and Iran is the fact that water resources are scarce due to the harsh desert climate of the region. In Afghanistan, the river is generally used for agriculture; on the other hand, in Iran, it meets the water needs of the local people in Sistan and Baluchistan and is of vital importance for agriculture.

However, Afghanistan's recent dam construction initiatives on these waters have occasionally caused tensions. Indeed, the dam and irrigation projects undertaken by the Afghan government on the Helmand River have affected the water flow to Iran, leading to economic difficulties related to agriculture and livestock farming, as well as diplomatic tensions, at times accompanied by strong statements by the authorities of the two countries. According to Iranian statements, these projects have significantly reduced Helmand's water flow, worsening Iran's drought (Rahimi, 2021). While Iran claims that these projects are against inter-

national law, Afghanistan has insisted that the use of water resources is part of its sovereign rights (Mohammadi, 2022).

Although these historical disputes do not cause tensions in the Taliban government as they did previously, their potential to create crisis in a general sense remains.

The Helmand River Disputes in the Modern Period and Conflicts

Today, factors such as increasing population, agricultural needs, and climate change make water management and distribution more challenging. This has led to a decline in the flow of the Helmand River and severe droughts in eastern Iran (Karimi, 2023). Projects such as the Kajaki Dam were realized to meet Afghanistan's energy needs and increase agricultural production (Davoodi & Ahmadi, 2022). Yet, these projects have raised major concerns about Iran's access to water, increasing diplomatic tension. Iran considers this a violation of international law and argues that Afghanistan is diverting the river flow for its own interests (Rezaei, 2021).

In particular, the Sistan and Baluchistan region in eastern Iran is heavily dependent on the Helmand River. Agricultural activities and drinking water resources in the region have been severely affected due to the decrease in the river flow. This has further exacerbated the drought and water scarcity in Iran (Ahmadzadeh et al., 2020). The Iranian government has raised the issue on international platforms, demanding Afghanistan reconsider its water policy (Mohammadi, 2022).

In response to these criticisms, Afghanistan argues for the legitimacy of using water resources for its own economic development. In defending Afghanistan's water policies, some experts state that the dam projects contribute to economic growth by increasing the country's energy production and agricultural productivity (Rahimi, 2023). Still, this issue's potential for crisis remains.

Meanwhile, it is possible to argue that, compared to previous periods, both sides have adopted a more conciliatory attitude after 2021. In fact, the current Kabul government completely freed the water flow to Iran between October 2023 and September 2024 (Amini, 2024). Experts advise establishing a joint water commission and increased international

mediation efforts to resolve the problems on the Helmand River (Harrison, 2023).

Historical and Legal Framework of Water Disputes

The underlying issue in the disputes over water resources between Afghanistan and Iran is the sharing of the vital Helmand River waterways. In this context, the discussion below includes the history, ongoing implementation, and current status of the Helmand River Water Treaty signed in 1973 are briefly discussed below, as well as an evaluation of the dispute in terms of domestic and international law.

1973 Helmand River Water Treaty and Its Implementation

The Helmand River Water Treaty was signed between Afghanistan and Iran in 1973 in an effort to provide a clear-cut division of the Helmand River's water use and balance the needs of both parties. The treaty designated 70% of the water to Afghanistan and 30% to Iran, allowing both countries to benefit from the river (Aram, 2022:618).

The 1973 Helmand River Water Treaty is still valid today but has been violated and disputed by both parties. In particular, the instability and civil war faced by the government in Afghanistan have made the implementation of the agreement challenging and urged Iran to make more aggressive water demands in this situation. The Afghan government's lack of sufficient resources and infrastructure for water management has created major problems in efficiently using water resources (Ahmed, 2023).

Iran has occasionally developed projects to increase the capacity of dams on the Helmand River to limit the water flow from Afghanistan. Afghanistan, on the other hand, has viewed such Iranian initiatives as a threat to its national sovereignty and fair sharing of natural resources. Both sides have been accused of violating the agreement from time to time (Sadat & Sayed, 2024).

Helmand Water Dispute in Terms of International Law

The Helmand River Water Treaty has become a problem that needs to

be evaluated within the framework of international law beyond being a bilateral issue. The United Nations Convention on Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, adopted in 1997, is one of the main reference points in resolving such water disputes. The convention aims to promote cooperation between countries for a fair solution regarding the management of watercourses. (McCaffrey, 2001; United Nations, 1997)

Observably, such international norms are not sufficiently implemented in the legal issues of water sharing between Afghanistan and Iran. Both parties have occasionally acted in line with their own national interests and deviated from the framework of international law. Thus, not only domestic political dynamics but also the principles of international law should lay the groundwork for future agreements or negotiation processes between the parties regarding water sharing (Khan, 2023).

The Impact of Climate Change on the Water Resources of the Two Countries

Water resources have great strategic importance due to the positioning of Afghanistan and Iran in the arid segments of the region. However, the water resources in these countries are threatened by the increase in temperature, the acceleration of the melting of snow and glaciers, and the decrease in precipitation, all consequences of climate change (IPCC, 2022).

The Helmand River, located in southeastern Afghanistan and formed by snow melting in mountainous areas, has been dramatically affected by such climatic changes (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit [AREU], 2021). In addition, increasing drought in the region leads to a decrease in groundwater levels.

A similar situation is also present in Iran, one of the driest countries in the Middle East. As a consequence of climate change, water reserves in Iran are gradually decreasing, and groundwater levels are falling. Rivers like Zayandeh Rud are especially experiencing a loss of flow due to the decrease in annual precipitation and warmer winters, which makes it challenging to manage water (FAO, 2020).

The Impact of Drought and Changes in Water Levels on the Two Countries

Afghanistan faces major challenges due to drought. The droughts in 2018 and 2019 have greatly affected the country's agricultural production, and the decrease in water levels in the Helmand River has exacerbated this situation. The fact that agricultural lands have become infertile due to drought has also deepened the country's water management problems (AREU, 2021). The decrease in water resources influences especially the agricultural sector as it requires irrigation, creating regional insecurity and social unrest.

Iran is experiencing similar challenges due to drought. Especially since the early 2000s, drought in southeastern Iran has posed a serious threat to drinking water resources and agricultural lands. In 2008, water shortages in the Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari region of Iran severely affected the local population, and many villages experienced water supply crises (Iranian Journal of Environmental Health, 2019). In addition, the decline in groundwater levels in Iran has jeopardized the sustainability of agricultural production. This situation poses significant challenges for both drinking water supply and industrial water needs.

Both countries are seriously affected by climate change and need to take steps in this regard.

Although Afghanistan has developed national water management plans to use its water resources more efficiently, its current infrastructure and capacity are limited. Therefore, more training and capacity-building programs are needed on issues such as the more efficient use of water, modernization of irrigation systems, protection of groundwater resources, and dam construction (AREU, 2021).

Iran is developing water resource protection projects to combat climate change and aims to popularize technologies such as drip irrigation systems, especially for efficient water use in agriculture. In addition, various water storage and groundwater basin refilling projects are being implemented to raise groundwater levels. However, the success of such Iranian projects also depends on Iran's ability to cooperate regionally on fair and sustainable water sharing (FAO, 2020).

The significant point here is that Afghanistan and Iran cannot overcome

these problems with national efforts alone. In order to better manage the effects of climate change and water crisis, regional cooperation between the parties is vital. A tighter diplomatic and legal framework is needed to resolve disputes over water sharing. Furthermore, both countries can develop further cooperation based on research and data sharing to mitigate the impact of climate change (IPCC, 2022).

Afghanistan's Attitude on the Helmand River

Afghanistan's water management is challenged by its geography and infrastructure deficiencies. While the country has essential river basins such as Helmand, Amu Darya, and Kabul, the efficient distribution and sustainability of water resources are still problematic. In recent years, water management policies have focused on proper water use, efficient distribution, and pollution prevention. However, these strategies are reinforced by regional cooperation and diplomatic efforts and are affected by tensions with neighboring countries (Areu, 2021).

Afghanistan has initiated various dam projects to use its water resources efficiently. The Kajaki Dam, built on the Helmand River, is critical for irrigation, hydroelectric power generation, and drinking water supply. Moreover, smaller-scale dams and water storage facilities are in the construction phase to protect groundwater resources. Still, these projects face obstacles such as security issues, infrastructure deficiencies, and financial difficulties (FAO, 2020).

Iran's Attitude towards Afghanistan's Water Projects

Afghanistan's water management policies, especially those on the Helmand River, directly affect Iran, which opposes Afghanistan's dam construction and water storage projects on the river. Iran is also concerned that these projects will reduce the Helmand River's water flow into Iran.

Iran continues to exert diplomatic pressure against such projects, and at the same time, it faces disputes with Afghanistan over the fair sharing of water resources.

Iran's Attitude towards the Helmand River

Iran's various policy efforts are not limited to the Helmand River but also aim to alleviate the water crisis in general, which include various educational programs on the efficient use of water, the implementation of irrigation techniques, and water-saving methods (Mesgaran, 2018).

In addition, Iran is developing projects to protect underground water basins. The rapid decline of groundwater levels is one of the underlying reasons for Iran's water crisis. In order to solve this problem, the objective is set to store water in underground reservoirs and reduce water use for irrigation (Iran Energy Press, 2023; Energy Information Administration, 2022).

Conclusion

This long-lasting problem has entered a crossroads with the stability achieved in Afghanistan after 2021. Either the two countries will adopt a win-win policy and find a permanent solution to this problem, or they will opt for a win-lose approach, laying the foundations for future instabilities in the region.

Although negotiations over time have been held repeatedly to provide a conclusive solution to the problem, it is hard to say that a complete agreement has been reached between the two parties. In this regard, although international organizations such as the UN and regional countries have tried to mediate to resolve water disputes between these two countries, most of these attempts have not been successful due to political obstacles and regional tensions (IPCC, 2022).

Therefore, it is vital for the two countries to have a common-sense approach to the fair and efficient sharing of water, to develop an effective policy, to determine a common strategy, and to involve regional countries and international organizations in the process for the solution of the problem. This cooperation will create significant opportunities not only in terms of water management but also in terms of regional security, economic development, and environmental protection (UN Water, 2021). Moreover, both countries need to develop policies to educate local people and encourage efficient water use.

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HISTORICAL PROCESS AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE WATER DISPUTE BETWEEN INDIA AND BANGLADESH

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Introduction

Historically, the water dispute between Bangladesh and India has been a major issue between the neighboring countries. This conflict centers around the water sharing of the Ganges and Teesta Rivers. A significant point of contention is the Farakka Barrage, constructed on the Bhagirathi Hooghly River, which has been a focal point of the dispute since 1950 when the Indian government announced plans to build the barrage in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The dispute persisted until the signing of a treaty with Bangladesh in 1996. Another dispute emerged in 1979 when the West Bengal government initiated the construction of a barrage on the Teesta River. Despite numerous attempts to resolve these disputes, progress has been minimal. This chapter will therefore explore the historical development of water sharing and the resulting disputes between Bangladesh and India.

Both Bangladesh and India frequently contend with natural forces such as floods. The two countries share at least 54 rivers, including the Ganges and Brahmaputra, which flow from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. These rivers are crucial for various reasons, including massive agricultural use, fisheries, navigation, and preventing saltwater intrusion in Bangladesh. Consequently, both nations aim to safeguard their interests through various water-sharing agreements.

Recently, in 2022, both Bangladesh and India signed an agreement to share water from the Kushiara River for irrigation purposes. However, this agreement has not been very effective in the broader context of their water-sharing issues. The central government of India has made numerous attempts to resolve and secure long-term water-sharing treaties for the major rivers between the two countries. Nevertheless, these efforts have often been hindered by local politics in India, particularly the policies and political dynamics in West Bengal. This has led to the failure of agreements on key rivers, such as the Ganges and the Teesta.

From Bangladesh's perspective, water sharing and disputes with India represent some of the most severe challenges, with recent events highlighting the gravity of the situation. Evidence suggests that Bangladesh experienced one of its worst floods in decades in the southern part of the country, attributed to actions by India (Mitra, Saeed, Coren, Wright, and Harvey, 2024). Additionally, the eastern border districts of Bangladesh have faced extraordinary flooding due to the release of water from the Dumbur Dam, located upstream of the Gumti River in India's Tripura State (Times of India, 2024). This incident has rekindled long-standing tensions between the two nations, with Bangladesh accusing India of negligence and recklessness in managing shared water resources. Indo-Bangladeshi negotiations over water resources are characterized by mistrust, with Bangladesh perceiving India as a hegemon focused solely on its self-interest, often at the expense of Bangladesh (Subedi, 1999). This chapter, therefore, will explore two of the most significant water crises between Bangladesh and India—the Farakka and Teesta barrages. By examining these cases, it will highlight the issues surrounding water sharing and the underlying reasons for the disputes between these neighboring countries.

From Water Sharing to Water Dispute- An Issue of Geopolitics

Since 1971, after Bangladesh gained independence, water-sharing issues

with India have been a top priority for both countries. In 1972, they established the Joint River Commission (JRC) to explore potential solutions for these problems. The JRC was created as a high-level platform for policymakers from both nations to address transboundary water issues and resolve them peacefully (Islam, 2021).

Although the Joint River Commission (JRC) was established in 1972 to address water-sharing issues, a resolution was not achieved until 1996, when the Ganga Water Treaty was signed between the two countries. Despite efforts to resolve the problem, including Bangladesh's appeal to the UN, these attempts were unsuccessful as India preferred to address the issue bilaterally.

The Policy and Politics of the Farakka Barrage

The year 1975 was crucial for understanding the Bangladesh-India water-sharing issue. In April 1975, India constructed the Farakka Barrage to divert water from the Ganga River to the Hooghly River in India. The barrage was designed to divert 1,100 cubic meters per second into the Hooghly River, but this amount was insufficient to flush out the sediment from the river (Mital, 2016).

However, subsequent to the finalization of the Farakka Dam, both nations originally concurred to uphold the water distribution for 41 days during the arid period. Nevertheless, after the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975, India independently redirected the water until 1977, generating significant friction between the two countries. To address the issue, they signed a five-year agreement in 1977, which was renewed in 1988. Additionally, two MOUs were signed between Bangladesh and India in 1982 and 1984. However, no consensus was achieved on the dry season water flow. The water-sharing issue was revisited during the Commonwealth Summit in Nassau, Bahamas, in October 1985, where both countries concurred on signing another MOU (Rahman, 2006).

On November 22, 1985, a new MOU was finalized for a duration of three years. In October 1986, both nations designated specialists to investigate possibilities for water retention in the upper Ganges basin in Nepal, but this initiative was unsuccessful. Between 1988 and 1996, no new agreements were signed. Bangladesh raised the issue at the Commonwealth Summit

in Cyprus in October 1993 and again on October 23, 1995, at the 50th UN General Assembly, highlighting the hardships faced by its people due to the water diversion. However, these efforts did not yield any positive results (Rahman, 2006).

Through the Farakka Barrage, India has effectively disrupted the natural flow of water from the Ganga River into Bangladesh. During the monsoon season, when water levels in the Ganga are excessive, India opens the Farakka Barrage gates, causing significant flooding in Bangladesh (Nazrul, 2019). Conversely, during the summer season, India closes the gates, leading to droughts, water shortages, impeded navigation, and public health crises in Bangladesh. This water scarcity severely affects agricultural production in Bangladesh, as access to adequate water becomes a critical challenge (Giordano, Giordano & Wolf, 1996).

The Farakka Barrage, located approximately 17 kilometers from Bangladesh's western border with India, has a significant impact on Bangladesh, which is geographically positioned downstream and heavily reliant on the Ganga River for irrigation and inland navigation. Since its construction in 1975, the barrage has caused a persistent water crisis, leading to the gradual depletion of rivers connected to the Padma basin in Bangladesh. This has had long-term negative consequences for Bangladesh's ecology, agriculture, and overall water resources (The Daily Star, 2010).

The Farakka Barrage not only affects the people of Bangladesh but also has severe consequences for the residents of Malda and Murshidabad in India, significantly disrupting their daily livelihoods (Farhin, 2018). Furthermore, the barrage contributes to annual flooding in Bihar, exacerbating regional challenges (Huffington Post, 2017). This highlights how a single infrastructure project constructed by India has far-reaching implications—not only for Bangladesh but also for India itself—ultimately impacting the long-term dynamics of India-Bangladesh relations.

From a geopolitical perspective, the water issue between Bangladesh and India extends beyond economics or resource allocation; it is deeply intertwined with local and regional politics (Singh, 2011). India has often taken a leading role in shaping this issue, frequently employing non-transparent tactics despite the existence of the 30-year Ganga Water Treaty, signed in 1996 and set to expire in 2026 (Ray, 2011).

The Policy and Politics of the Teesta Water Sharing Issue

Locating the Teesta River is essential to grasp its significance for both Bangladesh and India. Originating in the northern region of India, the river flows through two key states, Sikkim and West Bengal. From there, it enters Bangladesh, where it merges with the Brahmaputra River, draining an area of 12,540 square kilometers before eventually flowing into the Bay of Bengal.

The Teesta River is one of the largest transboundary rivers in Bangladesh, following the Ganga, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers. It plays a crucial role in the livelihoods of approximately 21 million Bangladeshis who depend on it directly or indirectly (Asia Foundation, 2013). The river traverses 9,667 square kilometers across Bangladesh, making it a vital resource for the region.

The water disputes over the Teesta River began in the 1990s when Bangladesh constructed the Teesta Barrage to secure irrigation for its northern regions during the dry season. However, in 1996, India built the larger Gajoldoba Barrage upstream to safeguard its own interests, intensifying water disputes between the two nations (Chandan, 2019). This barrage has led to severe droughts and siltation (chars) in Bangladesh, as India's upstream position allows it to withdraw most of the water during the dry season. The Gajoldoba Barrage has caused the formation of significant char land in Bangladesh, particularly in Rangpur District, covering nearly 3,000 acres (Roy, 2015). Furthermore, the resulting water shortage has severely impacted Bangladeshi farmers, making it challenging to cultivate rice and other crops (The Daily Star, 2012).

Similarly to the Farakka Barrage, India's actions regarding the Teesta River have significantly impacted Bangladesh. Without adhering to international law (Liton, 2019), India frequently opens the Gajoldoba Barrage gates during the monsoon season, causing devastating floods in Bangladesh that destroy croplands, displace hundreds of thousands of people, and kill livestock. This behavior has also severely affected the livelihoods of fishermen and communities residing along the Teesta River (Chandan, 2019). Despite multiple initiatives by Bangladesh in 1983, 1996, 2000, 2010, and finally in 2011, the Teesta water-sharing dispute remains unresolved due to India's internal and regional political dynamics (Ranjan, 2017).

Conclusion

It is evident that both Bangladesh and India must work towards resolving their water disputes, as they share numerous international rivers. Addressing these issues is also essential for maintaining healthy bilateral relations. Most water disputes between the two nations stem from India's hegemonic behavior. Therefore, India should refrain from treating shared rivers solely as national resources or matters of national interest. Instead, adopting a more amicable and diplomatic approach to resolving these crises is crucial. As India aspires to solidify its status as a great power within the current international order, it must act more responsibly toward its neighbors. Sustaining conflicts with neighboring countries could ultimately harm India's long-term national interests.

Additionally, the implications of such a crisis will significantly impact food, human security, and unemployment, potentially escalating chaos and violence in the border areas between both countries. Both nations must adopt a more constructive approach and seek a resolution to address future insecurity and prevent further conflict. In a protracted conflict, there are no winners—both parties ultimately lose. This is especially true when the conflict involves neighboring countries, where the consequences are even more profound.

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HISTORICAL PROCESS AND CURRENT SITUATION OF THE WATER DISPUTE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Mehmet Öztürk

Introduction

Water is the direct and indirect source of life. Water is abundant in the world, and seas cover three-quarters of the Earth. Sea waters are salty in various proportions and constitute approximately 97.5% of the Earth's total water, while the remaining 2.5% is fresh water and is found in glacier form in the poles and as underground water in very deep geological layers. However, a constant cycle is induced by climatic conditions transforming salty water into fresh water via rainfall of the evaporated sea water and turning fresh water into salty water via streams.

Water is the fundamental element of life for every living being and will continue to be so. Unfortunately, the times when water was abundant—and more importantly, clean—when people were few and disputes over water were rare, are all in the past.

Water Conflicts

Today, despite the stability in the amount of water, conflicts over water have increased. There is a long history in humanity's past where water disputes sometimes turned into conflicts. The first known water conflict in world history occurred 4,500 years ago, right under our noses, in Mesopotamia, between the Sumerian city-states of Umma and Lagash, on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

Water Conflict Chronology has identified 1298 conflicts from the first water conflict that emerged to the present day, emphasizing that disagreements, disputes, and conflicts have intensified since then. Especially after World War II, division in the world led to the division of resources, and conflicts grew, and especially following the Industrial Revolution, problems related to water resources began to emerge.

Water has become much more valuable today because of the improvement in water storage techniques using concrete, the extraordinary increase in agricultural and industrial consumption, incorrect water policies, inefficient water management, the exponential increase in population, pollution of resources and channels, droughts and climate change disrupting the balance, and its value will increase even more in the future. Oddly enough, water disputes have started not only regarding transboundary waters but also as part of domestic sharing debates.

Significant Water Disputes in the World

Today's world has large and small transboundary water disputes in nearly three hundred transboundary water basins spanning almost all continents. Examples include the Nile River – Africa's lifeline –, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers originating in Türkiye, the Indus River system in the subcontinent, which is the focus point of this article, the Amu Darya and Syr Darya – Central Asia's invigorators –, the Mekong River that crosses Indochina from north to south and empties into the South China Sea, and the Rio Grande, which forms a border of more than two thousand kilometers between the United States and Mexico.

There are also many domestic disputes over water. One of the most striking examples is the Colorado River, known as the 'American Nile.' The

‘seven dry’ states of the USA have been fighting over the river’s waters for over a century.

In ancient times, water was an instrument of war used in tactics such as digging trenches, changing riverbeds, thirsting out, poisoning, etc. Today, water is perhaps in its most valuable period in human history and is being used intensively as an instrument of destabilization and oppression. Despite the skepticism of local and foreign experts on the subject, water itself is rapidly becoming a cause of conflict.

History of Water Crisis in the Indian Subcontinent

When the withdrawal of the British Empire, on which the sun never sets, from the Subcontinent it had dominated for nearly a century became certain, the region was divided not by territorial lines but by religion. On one side, Pakistan (which includes present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh), and on the other, India gained their independence on consecutive days, August 14 and 15, 1947. The partition, planned based on certain principles, could not be fully realized, and the two newly independent neighbors would succumb to chronic problems, including conflict, that remain unresolved today.

The most important of these problems was the question of who would annex Kashmir. Despite the UN intervention at India’s request to hold a referendum for the Kashmiri people to determine their own future, a referendum was never held. The two neighboring countries, Pakistan and India, became sworn enemies and even went to war. The Kashmir issue has not been resolved to this day and has become one of the longest-pending issues on the UN agenda.

In addition to Kashmir’s geo-strategic position, it had another vital importance that was perhaps not fully understood at the time: the water resources that sustain the Indian subcontinent originate from or pass through this region. This situation was of crucial importance for both newly independent countries. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, seemed to be well aware of this issue.

Water Distribution Between India and Pakistan

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, known as Quaid-e-Azam, said, 'Kashmir is our jugular vein.' He was aware of the issue, but his death about a year after independence was perhaps a turning point for Pakistan in many ways. It would have been clear at the very beginning of independence that Kashmir was, in fact, the country's 'jugular vein.'

During their rule of the Indian subcontinent from 1857 to 1947, the British developed the Indus Basin irrigation system, the world's largest continuous irrigation network. The system has been continuously developed since then and includes three major dams and more than 100 minor dams that manage water flow. Twelve connecting canals facilitate water transfer between rivers. The system extends to more than 64,000 km of minor canals that distribute water to rural areas. More than 1.6 million km of ditches and canals collectively irrigate Pakistan's agricultural lands.

When partition was realized, and the territory was divided, the system that was designed to work as a single piece was also subjected to division. While the distribution unit and water supply gates of the system remained in India, which found itself in the upper basin, the water channels remained in Pakistan, positioned in the lower basin. Therefore, although India was not in a position to stop the water flow, it became the superior hand in the irrigation system, having control of the water.

The Water Crisis Between India and Pakistan and International Recommendations

When India closed the two water supply gates providing Pakistan with water in 1948, a water crisis emerged between the two neighbors. For an immediate and short-term solution, first Standstill Agreement was signed. The 'Inter-Dominion Accord' stipulated that Pakistan would make annual payments for the water it received, but the problem remained unresolved.

When India had turned its leverage into an instrument of pressure, Pakistan threatened India with applying to the International Court of

Justice (ICJ). India wanted to resolve the issue through bilateral negotiations, promising to prevent Pakistan's application to the ICJ, but the problem soon flared up again. Finally, India conceded to arbitration in 1950 to resolve the issue.

David Lilienthal, former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority, a water development project in the US, and later the US Atomic Energy Commission chairman, visited the region in 1951 ostensibly to write an investigative article for Collier's magazine. Lilienthal visited both sides of the water dispute, hoping to do business in the region, and emphasized in his article how water could become a devastating bomb in India's hands, inevitably triggering a war that needed to be prevented. For Lilienthal, the problem was not political but economic; it could be solved by engineers agreeing on joint water development in the Indus basin, and it would be a feasible project with the World Bank aid. Lilienthal ignored the deep hostility between the two countries due to his strong commercial concerns and business prospects in the region.

As one of the instruments of domination of those who established the post-colonial world order, the World Bank (WB), or the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) at the time, seemed already willing for this job. Some attribute this arrangement to the financial dealings between Lilienthal and the World Bank president. About a month after Lilienthal's article was published, WB President Eugene Black paid goodwill visits to the two countries regarding the matter. He proposed an agreement that the World Bank would also sign, and both parties accepted it.

Indus Water Basin

The Indus water basin consists of the Indus River and its dozens of tributaries. Glaciers and large and small tributaries originating from the high mountains of Ngari Province in Western Tibet, the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush in Afghanistan, and the Karakoram feed the vast Indus River and the Indus system in general.

The major tributaries of the Indus River include the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Satluj, Beas, Shyok, Kishan Ganga (Neelum), Zaskar, Gilgit, Swat, Kabul, Tochi, Kurram, Gumal and many other.

The Indus River has an estimated flow rate of 5500 m³/s, making it the 52nd highest-flow river in the world. It flows through 3100 km before emptying into the Arabian Sea.

90% of Pakistan's food production and 65% of its employment depend on farming and animal husbandry supported by the Indus. Thus, despite having several other smaller rivers, Pakistan is heavily dependent on the Indus. On the other hand, India hosts 14 large, 44 medium, and 55 small river basins.

The Indus Waters Treaty

The process spanned nine years. In fact, due to such delay, India gave an ultimatum at one point that if there were no agreement by 1962, it would take the unilateral initiative in water use.

When the World Bank went forward with the loans and grants for both countries, the parties signed the Indus Waters Treaty in Karachi, the capital of Pakistan at the time, on September 19, 1960. For India, the treaty was signed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru; for Pakistan, by Field Marshal Ayub Khan, and on behalf of the World Bank, then the 'International Bank for Reconstruction and Development,' by W.A.B. Iliff.

The treaty envisaged the division of the Indus River and its five tributaries between the two parties. India was given complete control of the eastern rivers, the Beas, Ravi, and Sutlej. The western rivers, the Indus River, and its two tributaries, the Chenab and Jhelum, were left to Pakistan. Still, India was also permitted to use water for 'certain local, non-consumptive and agricultural purposes,' which, according to sources, amounts to seven percent of the water capacity. In addition, India was granted the right to generate electricity on the western rivers, provided it adhered to certain design and operational criteria, though without restrictions on operation. According to the treaty, financial assistance would also be administered through the World Bank in the form of loans and grants for the construction of new dams and connecting canals.

The treaty also envisaged the establishment of a Permanent Indus Commission with the participation of one commissioner from each country to provide a channel of communication and resolve issues related to the treaty's implementation. "Differences" of opinion between the two

countries would be resolved by a neutral expert, and “disputes” would be referred to an ad hoc tribunal called the “Court of Arbitration.” Over the years, numerous disputes were resolved peacefully through the Permanent Indus Commission.

Winners and Losers

The Indus Waters Treaty was the first real compromise between the two parties following a bloody ‘partition.’ Therefore, if the good intentions had been preserved, the Indus Waters Treaty could have been an initial step toward solving other problems, yet the process did not unfold this way. From an objective point of view, Pakistan, which will always be dependent on foreign countries for water as a downstream country, suffered a loss right from the beginning by ceding all of its eastern rivers to India and also making it a minor shareholder of the western rivers. In our opinion, Pakistan should have been a shareholder of the eastern rivers, at least with a small share.

The fact that it would have access to more water than India through the Indus water system tempted Pakistan to sign the treaty, perhaps with the reasoning that India could not prevent the flow of water due to geographical conditions and technical impossibilities at that time or perhaps because of the credits and grants to be provided through the treaty.

One criticism of the treaty directed at Pakistan is that competent individuals did not conduct the negotiation process. Moreover, experts have heavily criticized Pakistan’s approval of four wastewater channels originating from India to pass through its territory. As of now, Pakistan has no other instrument other than appealing to international authorities in water disputes with India. India managed to immobilize the treaty.

The first Prime Minister of India and signatory to the Indus Waters Treaty, Jawaharlal Nehru, once described dams as the ‘temples of modern India’ because dams would integrate agricultural development and village economy with rapid industrialization and urban economic growth. Therefore, India was well aware and prepared, carefully considering its future moves like a chess game. To successfully achieve its objectives, it took time to conduct the treaty process with a capable technocrat, Niranjan Das Gulhati.

The treaty reinforced India's already advantageous position as an upper basin country, designating three of the rivers fully for India's use as well as the shares of the other rivers. Once the treaty was secured, India was free to pursue its other moves. In the following period, India began to use water as an instrument of pressure at every opportunity and sought a hydro politics approach.

Despite the ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan, the Indus Waters Treaty had considerable functionality until the late 1990s, when India announced plans to build the Baglihar Hydroelectric Project on the Chenab River, located in the Pakistani-controlled part of Kashmir.

Dispute and Resolution

Pakistan objected to the Baglihar Project, which began construction in 1999, arguing that its design parameters violated the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960. Pakistan's claim was that the way India designed these dams violated its absolute obligation to allow water to flow.

Pakistan also opposed India's 330-megawatt Kishanganga hydroelectric project on the Jhelum River (completed in 2018) and the 850-megawatt Ratle project on the Chenab River (expected to be completed in 2026). It is noteworthy that Pakistan's objections have not slowed India down. Thus, the disputes appear to be over the western rivers allocated to Pakistan by the Indus Waters Treaty.

Pakistan's objections to these projects are pertinent to violations of design criteria proposed in the Indus Waters Treaty and storage projects constructed by India on western rivers. Pakistan is concerned that these projects will allow India to gain manipulative control over water flowing into Pakistan.

The dispute resolution mechanism provided by Article 9 of the Indus Waters Treaty is a three-tiered mechanism consisting of a Commissioner, a Neutral Expert, and a Court of Arbitration. It is envisaged that the problems, divided into 'Differences' and 'Disputes,' will be resolved in three stages. First, the two parties are expected to resolve their differences in the Permanent Indus Commission, established as per the treaty for the resolution of the problems, with each party represented by a Commissioner. The issues on which the two parties are 'in disagree-

ment' are expected to be resolved through a neutral expert. Unsettled, a mediator is required for the resolution of the issues.

We cannot consider the water dispute between the two countries separate from other issues, especially the Kashmir conflict. The fundamental issue, in fact, is the dispute over Kashmir, and the water problems have intensified as the Kashmir issue has gradually become chronic. Both countries' full sovereignty claims over Kashmir have put the nuclear neighbors in a deadlock, resulting in conflicts. Furthermore, each party has accused the other of creating instability in the other's territory.

The tension between the parties escalated further when the current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, advocating the Hindu nationalist Hindutva ideology of the Indian far-right, which aims to establish Hindu hegemony in India, came to power in 2014. As a matter of fact, Modi's rhetoric shifted in 2016 after the killing of 19 Indian soldiers in an attack by pro-Pakistani Kashmiri militants on the Indian army's brigade headquarters in the Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir. India blamed Pakistan for the attack, but Islamabad denied its involvement.

Following the attack, Indian officials quoted for the media Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement, asserting that New Delhi could use India's position as the upper Indus basin state as a weapon to punish Pakistan through water restrictions, and declaring "Blood and water cannot flow together." This meant a threat by Modi to cut off Pakistan's water supply. Although it seems unfeasible today, India is signaling that it will embark on such madness in the medium and long term.

The Current Situation

Since India's decision to revoke the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, relations between the two countries have deteriorated further. As a 'middle ground' in the disputes, The World Bank decided in 2022 to delegate the issue to both a neutral expert, upon Indian demand, and to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, as requested by Pakistan. Rejecting any arbitration, India only participates in the mediation of the neutral expert.

As of now, it is possible to assert that India's position may evolve into a more assertive one, leveraging its advantage as an upstream country

to preserve its status, especially given that India has strengthened itself multi-dimensionally, increasing its global influence. On the other hand, Pakistan will only be able to pursue its water-related claims through international law.

Describing the treaty as a 'historical mistake,' India argues for the treaty's revision and aspires to cancel the role of the third parties in the disputes. Claiming that Pakistan was granted too much water share in the treaty, India further demands the inclusion of terrorism matters into the treaty. India has also been hinting that it will unilaterally terminate the treaty if Pakistan does not accept such revisions.

India is primarily an upper basin country in control of waters and will initiate negotiations with the self-confidence of a semi-superpower. In addition, the attitudes of international powers are also in India's favor.

As for Pakistan, it holds a weak negotiating position as a lower basin country, already the losing party in the treaty, struggling with its own internal problems, and being economically weak and dependent. Although Pakistan does not want to amend the fundamental matters, it is not against revising the Indus Waters Treaty. In fact, this position is logical, as much water has flowed under the bridge since the signing of the treaty in 1960.

Under the current circumstances, both countries concur that the treaty signed 64 years ago needs to be revised. However, none of the parties should assume an assertive role due to their advantageous status. Instead, the revision should involve mutually sincere negotiations, addressing current problems such as climate change, the rapid melting of glaciers that provide 85% of the river waters, and pollution of resources and streams.

The treaty has a mechanism for resolving the issues. It is crucial for the parties to enter into a constructive dialogue. They can overcome the problem this time as they did before. The World Bank, as the third-party signatory of the treaty, should also take an active facilitating role in this regard. It is clear that failure to find a solution to the issue will create even greater problems that cannot be compensated for in the medium and long term. It is no wonder that Kashmir has been described as a 'Nuclear Flashpoint'; it is both the source and route of the waters

that the two countries struggle to share, with the water dispute being one of the triggering factors of this flashpoint. In addition, India should carefully consider the implications of asserting its upstream position, as it might have a backfiring impact on its water relations with China, an upstream country relative to India.

Conclusion

Niranjan D. Gulhati, the chief Indian negotiator in the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960, considered the treaty one of the best water-sharing agreements in the world, and later made an important confession and, more importantly, gave a piece of advice. Niranjan D. Gulhati admitted in a statement that ‘his biggest disappointment was that his word as a professional engineer was looked upon with skepticism because he was sitting at the negotiating table for a political cause.’

The chief negotiator of India thus confessed that the Indian side adopted a negative attitude towards implementing the treaty. This is a crucial demonstration of the later negative attitude adopted by India in terms of implementing the treaty as the country grew stronger, regardless of the then-Indian prime minister’s signature.

The following advisory quote by Gulhati in this context may be the starting point for the treaty’s revision: ‘We had to keep in view the interests of the other side: they must live; we must live. They must have water; we must have water.’

Taking the example of good deeds, cooperation, and solidarity appear to be a suitable way for both sides to solve their problems rather than continuing disagreements that harm both. The Indus waters should not divide; on the contrary, they should unite.

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REGIONAL SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MOVEMENTS

ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Assoc. Prof. H. Hilal Şahin

South Asia is a crucial region consisting Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, reflecting ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity and hosting a significant portion of the world's population with various cultural representations.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a fascinating country with a rich history, deep-rooted cultural traditions, and scenic beauty. It is also distinguished by its ethnic diversity. A key section of the Silk Road, this country is on the trade routes extending from Asia to Europe. Its strategic location has made Afghanistan susceptible to the influence of numerous cultures, resulting in the development of a unique cultural heritage in the country, so much so that it is known to host 18 different ethnic groups—

the largest of which include Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Turkmen, Baluch, and Uzbek. Pashtun, Tajik, and Turks also have enough influence to form a political base (Çınarlı, 2012, 74).

The Pashtuns, the major group in Afghanistan, are Muslims and speak Pashto. Tajiks speak the Dari (Afghan Persian) dialect and are primarily an urban population living mainly in and around Kabul, where they are assimilated with other ethnic populations. They are generally well-educated, often involved in bureaucracy, and work as tradesmen and artisans.

Uzbeks and Turkmens are the most populous Turkic tribes in Afghanistan and speak Uzbek (Azaad, 2019, 11), sustaining their existence under the influence and political leadership of the Uzbeks (Çelikdönmez, 2021, İlhan 2022, 603-629).

Afghans maintain Islamic traditions and celebrate common holidays. The tribal structure of Afghan society is generally considered one of the main reasons for political instability and conflict. Ethnicity permeates a wide range of issues, from daily life to political behavior. Each ethnic group has its own traditions and customs. While Pashtuns are known for their hospitality, Tajiks have a rich literary history. Uzbeks, on the other hand, are generally engaged in animal husbandry and trade in handicrafts, carpets, animal food, etc. These markets also serve as social centers.

Popular dishes in Afghan cuisine include pilaf, kebab, Ashak, Mantu, Kabuli, Bolani, Borani Banjan, Avshak, and Afghan bread. Traditional music is especially enriched with classical music forms. Traditional music, dance, food, clothing, and handicrafts are an important part of Afghan culture. Persian songs are very popular in Afghanistan. The majority of the population in Afghanistan is Muslim; however, there are also Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu communities.

Clothing in Afghanistan has changed significantly, especially under the Taliban, and traditional dress has been re-adopted. Turkmen men's clothing includes supple leather boots, belted tunics, voluminous long-sleeved coats, and lambskin hats. Women wear long, colorful, floral dresses over trousers and a headscarf-like headdress decorated with jewelry and an abundance of jewelry.

Football and cricket are the prominent sports branches in Afghanistan. Sports are significant as they reflect social and cultural changes and continue to be represented in the international arena. Buzkashi is a traditional sport for Uzbeks.

Many cultures and civilizations made an impact on Afghanistan throughout its history, resulting in a rich architectural and artistic heritage, significant of which include the Blue Mosque (Mausoleum of Hazrat Ali), the Minaret of Jam, and the Bamiyan Buddhist Statues.

Handmade carpets have an essential place in handicrafts. In addition, miniature art is an integral part of Afghan culture. Poetry, folk tales, songs, and dances are enduring artistic traditions.

Problems related to marriage in Afghanistan are complex and suggested solutions include increasing the education level, providing economic support, and creating social awareness. Women do not have the right to inherit in Afghanistan.

Considering the current socio-political state of affairs, the internal conflicts and wars experienced throughout history appear to be the most significant indicators of the failure to establish national unity in Afghanistan. No matter that an “Afghan identity” ostensibly exists, this identity has prevented other ethnic groups from forming a common fate with the country because it only distinguishes the majority of Pashtuns. Although “failed states” are commonly observed in international relations, Afghanistan is situated in the global political arena as a community that has not gained the status of an independent state in modern times.

Many families in Afghanistan have been living in difficult conditions due to the deepening economic crisis in recent years. More than 1,400 families in the Bamyán region are struggling to survive in caves. According to UN data, 28.3 million people in the country are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Women’s rights have been severely restricted since the Taliban came to power. However, efforts continue to ensure that women take a more active role in society through some social service projects.

Afghanistan’s social and cultural life is historically complex, and today’s problems deepen this complexity. Ethnic diversity leads to social conflicts alongside cultural richness. Economic difficulties and restric-

tions on women's rights cause significant changes in the country's social structure.

Bangladesh

Separated from West-East Pakistan in 1971, the People's Republic of Bangladesh's economy has almost caught up with India's, with its average per capita gross domestic product rising to \$715.68 from 1960 to 2023.

Bangladesh has a parliamentary democracy and a unitary state structure, the official religion being Islam. Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity are the four major religions in the country. Muslims constitute approximately 88.3 percent of the population. In this country, Hindus' freedom of religion is a matter that is paid special attention. Accordingly, Muslim students in Bangladesh have taken on the responsibility of protecting Hindu temples and churches in the capital, Dhaka, where approximately 13 million Hindus live (Karataş, 2024). Cultural dialogue in Bangladesh is exhibited in various ways. For instance, iftar meals are held every day during the month of Ramadan in front of a Buddhist monastery in Dhaka. Similarly, the initiative of the Dharmarajika Buddhist monastery to distribute food to poor and needy Muslims is a brilliant example of social harmony. Bangladesh strives to protect the rights of all ethnic and religious groups. As such, the country is one of the few countries in the world where various religions and ethnic tribes live together peacefully.

Sari and Lungi, as traditional garments, are the indicators of the significant place given to textile art in Bangladesh. Crafts such as stonework, weaving, and metalwork are also part of the cultural heritage.

In Bangladesh, holidays include various nonbusiness days of cultural and religious importance. Various religious holidays include Eid al-Fitr, Hindu community pujas, Easter Sunday, Christmas and Buddha Purnima. These holidays in Bangladesh play an essential role in social life and contribute to preserving cultural values. Each holiday has its own traditions and celebrations, reflecting the rich cultural fabric of the country. Peace and collaboration among different religions and ethnic groups are critical to preserving the cultural richness of Bangladesh.

The country's gastronomic diversity includes dishes such as Phuchka, Pitha, Murgi, pilaf, and salad.

Bhutan

Bhutan gained independence from India in 1949 and stands out with its social life, ethnic diversity, rich cultural structure, and people-oriented policies. The majority of the population is affiliated with Mahayana Buddhism, a religion that plays a crucial role in daily life. Although there is freedom of religion in Bhutan, Buddhism is a determining factor in many areas of life, and a Parliamentary Monarchy has been implemented in the Kingdom of Bhutan since 2008. Although Bhutan is the third smallest country in Asia, ethnic divisions and separatist ideas permeate its terrain (Türkmen, 2020).

There are smaller ethnic groups in the country, such as the Ngalops (Drukpa-Western Bhutanese), Sharchops (Eastern Bhutanese), Lhotshampas (Southern Bhutanese), Brokpas, Kurtöps, Bumthaps and Layas.

The Bhutanese government has long considered Buddhism to be the sole dominant religion, which has caused unrest among the Lhotshampas. Consequently, the Lhotshampas developed regional separatism, and in the late 1980s, the Bhutanese government began to grant the Lhotshampas more democratic and public rights. In addition, the ratio of ethnic groups classified according to religion in Bhutan to the total population is as follows: Tibetan Buddhists (Eastern and Western Nepalese) 75 percent, Hindus (Lhotshampas and Indians) 25 percent. The government now supports marriages between different ethnic groups, which were prohibited before the 1980s (Uygur, 2024).

Bhutan is home to the Hindu community's faith center. The Bhairab Kunda Shiva Temple and the Bhairab Kunda Temple reflect traditional Bhutanese architecture. Bhutan's famous dishes include Rice pilaf (Ema Datshi), Sakam Datshi, Red Rice Pilaf, Bhutanese Red Rice Pilaf with Chicken and Spinach, Jasha Maru, Phaksha Paa, and Suja.

Bhutanese architecture is distinctly traditional, with construction methods that use rammed earth and mud, stonework, and intricate woodwork around windows and roofs.

Bhutan has a matriarchal society. After marriage, men usually move into the women's household. Inheritance is often left to women, strengthening the role of women in the family. Polygamy is also legal. Bhutanese women have equal rights with men. Hundreds of monasteries, stupas, and religious institutions provide an intense atmosphere for the teachings of their living faith.

Monks play an important role in community life, and representatives of the monastic community are present on all important occasions. In the past, it was common for one male child from each family to enter the monastic order- a diminishing practice now.

Bhutan's textile tradition has gained international recognition in recent years. Bhutan's traditional culture remains vibrant with performing arts such as dance and music, which are integral to ceremonies and festivals throughout the country. Unlike many countries, traditional arts, centuries-old ceremonies, festivals, social behavior, and structures are not relics of a bygone era. They are still practiced as they were hundreds of years ago.

India

India is known for its remarkable diversity in social and cultural life, characterized by a complex texture of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional identities. India's structure is considerably complex due to historical migrations, the presence of indigenous tribes, and cultural interactions. In addition to the world's monotheist religions, eight major polytheistic religions also have believers in India. Furthermore, the country's twenty-two official languages, alongside a large number of various dialects, are spoken in India's twenty-two states and nine union territories. The significant religions include Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism (Dawns, 2018; Majeed, 2010; Times of India, 2010). There are numerous ethnic groups in India, such as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Bengali, Romani, Sindhi, Farsi, Pashtun, Parthian, Tai people, and local tribes (Ashutosh, 2010; The Economist, 2009; World Atlas, n.d.; Taşçı, 2019a).

India is the second largest Muslim country in the world, and Islam became prevalent in the country due to Turks. The first mosque founded

is the Cheraman Juma Masjid in Kerala. Muslim culture is an essential part of India's historical and cultural heritage. With the spread of Islam, many religious and cultural interactions took place; Sufi traditions also played an important role in this process.

The most recent example of ethnic segregation in India was in Kashmir. The majority of the Kashmir Valley is Muslim, and India annexed the region by the accession agreement signed in 1947. India and Pakistan fought three wars over the region between 1947, 1965, and 1999 (Taşçı, 2019b).

The architecture in multi-ethnic India is an artistic expression and proof of the country's historical evolution. Every structure reflects India's cultural richness, from ancient rock-carved caves to magnificent Mughal palaces. The Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, the Ajanta Caves, the Agra Fort, the Jama Masjid, the Shalimar Gardens, and Humayun's tomb are examples.

The diversity of Indian culture is reflected in the dietary habits, clothing styles, and countless dance forms. There are many traditional clothes for women and men in India. Women generally wear traditional clothes called "sari and punjabi" (Kleiderschrank, 2012). Colorful clothes symbolize people's connection to life. While black is the mourning color in many countries, including Türkiye, white has the same function in India (Stolz, 2007: 61). In many parts of India, men wear turbans similar to a kavuk. Sikh men wear turbans called "dastar, pag, keski, pagri or pagadi" as a religious object.

Due to religious harmony, numerous festivals and holidays are celebrated in India. The most famous ones include Holi, Diwali, Karwa Chauth, Gandhi Jayanti, Eid al-Fitr, and Republic Day. These festivals are significant occasions that strengthen the social structure of the population and bring different communities together. Each festival has its own traditions and rituals.

The popular sport in Indian culture is cricket, and music and dance are also very culturally significant (Myriam, 2003: 72-73). Dancing and singing are how people express their joy at every celebration. Music and dance also have a great influence on Indian theater and cinema (Banerjee, 2012: 20; Anonymous, 2011), and they are essential in performing

religious rituals apart from entertainment purposes. Similarly, music and dance have played a particular role in popularizing and appreciating Indian (Bollywood) films (Myriam, 2003: 79-82). The film market has become a means of cultural interaction between various cultures within Indian society as well as with South Asian peoples. Many centers besides Bombay hosted Indian films in different local languages (Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, etc.), called Kollywood and Tollywood (Kara and Kozluklu, 2020: 73-109). Bollywood functions as a critical soft power tool for India, exhibiting that its founding philosophy– preserving the country’s harmony – is still vivid.

Many women in India apply a red dye called “sindoor” or “kumkum” to their hair, symbolizing that they are married (Anonymous, Bindi, 2012). Following religious rituals at weddings, the groom applies sindoor to the bride’s hair, and thus they are married. Widows, on the other hand, do not apply sindoor. Indian society also takes characters from Indian mythology as role models, apart from their families.

The Maldives

The Maldives has an ethnically homogeneous population, and the entire population consists of Maldivians (Divehi). The Divehi are a people of Indo-Aryan origin and speak Maldivian (Divehi).

The ethnic structure of the Maldives has historically been shaped by the influence of various cultures and civilizations. At the intersection of old trade routes, the islands bear traces of Arab, Indian, African, and Asian cultures. Buddhism has been influential throughout the history of the Maldives, and in the 12th century, a large part of the population adopted Islam. However, Hindus and other religions constitute a particular segment of the Maldivian population. In this country, Hindus live in a region where they are granted exclusive religious freedom and continue their rituals in special places.

Migrant workers pursue many trades in the underpopulated country. The group with the largest migrant worker population in the country is Filipinos (Britannica, n.d.; Eaglenews, 2018).

The Maldives is home to rich and diverse architectural projects that are compatible with the natural environment and reflect a sustainable de-

sign approach. Additionally, it hosts projects like the world's first underwater hotel. There are also Islamic places of worship, such as Hukuru Miskiy Mosque and Grand Friday Mosque. The famous Maldivian cuisine includes Mas huni, Gulha, Garudhiya, Rihaakuru, and Maldivian pickle.

The Maldivian culture is similar to the neighboring Sri Lankan and Indian cultures. Local beliefs and traditions also play an important role in the country. Country-wide grand ceremonies and celebrations witness Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Independence Day, and Fishermen's Day.

Boduberu is the traditional Maldivian music and dance form, performed with large drums, percussion instruments, and rhythmic movements, usually in mass celebrations and festivals.

Lakudis are handmade woven textiles crafted using traditional patterns and colors, usually for clothing and decorative purposes.

Dhoni are traditional Maldivian boats, hand-crafted using centuries-old traditional methods, usually for fishing or transportation. These colorful cultural festivals and traditional arts of the Maldives reflect the rich cultural heritage of the country.

Nepal

Nepal is a highly multi-ethnic country. It harbors 125 ethnic groups, many languages, and various coexisting beliefs such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Kiratism, Christianity, and many others. The Nepalese people are made up of the Gurkha of Rajputana origin who migrated from India, the Bhutia and the Newar from South India, the Chhetri, the Brahman-Hill, the Magar, the Tharu, the Tamang, the Newar, and the Kami. Nepal presents itself as the world's only Hindu state, with an 80 percent Hindu population. Other religions, such as Buddhism and Islam, also find believers in the country. The Muslim population is estimated to be 5% of the total population. Ruled by a prince for a long time, Nepal went through a Maoist conflict in 1996. There was no progress in democracy or the economy, while the panchayat system that involved no political parties had continued between 1960 and 1990, the king's concentration of all power in his hands led the opposition to the current system to "radicalize" (Bisikletçiler, 2020, 29) and the 10-year

old Maoist struggle ended. Accordingly, the King's authority was limited in 2006, and a referendum was held for a new constitution in 2008, as a result of which, the form of government in the country was transformed into a federal parliamentary republic (Aljazeera, 2008).

Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Kiratism, Christianity, and many other beliefs coexist in Nepal.

When examining Nepalese architecture, structures that blend Hindu and Buddhist architectural forms are prominent, and in terms of style, they can be divided into three: pagoda, stupa, and shikhara. In recent years, Nepalese architecture has shifted towards modern practices, focusing on concrete structures. Prominent examples of Nepalese multicultural architecture include Pashupatinath Temple, Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Swayambhunath Stupa (Monkey Temple), Boudhanath Stupa, Kasthamandap Temple, Amitabha Monastery, Kopan Monastery, supplemented with wood, metal and stone work created by Newar artists.

Nepalese cuisine offers a rich cultural diversity, bringing together the tastes of different ethnic and religious groups. Popular dishes include momo, thukpa, dal bhat, and chataamari. The culinary culture in Nepal is not so foreign to us. Meatballs and pide are also present in Nepal. However, instead of bread, they consume plenty of boiled rice. These examples are just a few aspects of Nepalese multicultural society. The country's rich cultural heritage becomes even more evident in this environment where different communities live together peacefully and influence each other.

Pakistan

Pakistani society consists of ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Sindhis, Afghan Muhajirs, Pashtuns, Baloches, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Makranis. 97% of the population is Muslim, but minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Bahais also exist in the country. Baloches of Balochistan occasionally express the idea of an independent Balochistan alongside language-related demands. Kashmiris living in the Azad Kashmir region also express their aspiration for an independent Kashmir instead of joining India or Pakistan (Rahimi, 2021, 52; Yiğit, 2014).

More than 60 local languages are spoken in the country, with Urdu and

English being the official languages. While Hindu-Muslim marriages are nonexistent in Pakistan, Hindus tend to live in their own neighborhoods and marry within their own communities. Interactions are limited here, and some Muslim Pakistanis join Hindus on important Hindu holidays like Holi.

Some ancient Hindu temples in Pakistan attract people of all faiths, including Muslims. Important centers of the Hindu faith in Pakistan include Shri Hinglaj Mata temple, Pakistan's most prominent annual Hindu pilgrimage location, also known as shakti peetha. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, stated, "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste, or creed — that has nothing to do with the business of the State. (...) We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State." Observably, civil society organizations in the country have developed projects and practices to enhance tolerance in the interactions among communities in Pakistan. In this respect, the puppet show at the Thespianz Theater in Karachi, prominent with its conservatism, sent viewers a message of interfaith harmony, an example of many. Various initiatives developed to increase social tolerance are also observable (Meer and Meyer, 2016; Voanews, 2019).

Pakistani architecture bears Turkic influences and is a remarkable blend of Islamic, Indian, Turkic, and Persian styles.

Pakistan is an agricultural country. A large part of the agricultural lands is constituted by the plains irrigated by the Indus River, where mostly rice, cotton and wheat, tobacco, sugar cane, citrus fruits, and dates are grown. In addition to agriculture, animal husbandry also has an important place in the economy (Gelişim Ansiklopedisi, 1981).

Pakistani cuisine is known for its rich use of spices. Traditional dishes usually feature curry, roti (flatbread), and lassi (milk-based beverage). The dishes of Pakistani cuisine are inspired by British, Indian, and Central Asian cuisine.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, Buddhism is the official religion, and the official languages are Sinhala and Tamil. 70% of the country's population is Buddhist, and the country's ethnic structure is made up of Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils, and Moors (Muslim community) (Mermer, 2022).

Sri Lankan culture is a combination of Indian and European influences. The country harbors a rich history and diverse traditions, including Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, and Burgher cultures, as well as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Freedom of all religions is protected by law (MFA, n.d.). Inter-ethnic marriages are not common in Sri Lanka, but they sometimes do occur.

Sri Lanka is one of the world's richest and most diverse gemstone mining areas. The mineral Sinhalite was named after this region when it was first found there. Sri Lankan architecture shows the influence of European and Asian styles, as well as Buddhist forms.

Famous dishes of Sri Lankan cuisine are ambulthiyal (sour fish curry), Kottu, Kukul mas curry (trem curry), Parippu (dhal curry) Lamprais. Naval and air transportation is well developed in Sri Lanka, and there are 16 airports with different characteristics.

The socio-cultural structure of Sri Lanka has been shaped by the clustering of many ethnic groups and religions throughout history. With its rich traditions, colorful festivals, and deep religious beliefs, Sri Lanka offers a unique experience for both locals and visitors. This complex structure is one of the basic elements that form the country's identity.

Conclusion

South Asia's geostrategic location and economic potential play a critical role in the transformation of the international system. Strong historical and cultural relations are being developed with countries like Türkiye, as a result of which regional cooperation is enhanced. South Asia's dynamic structure and role in global strategies will continue to be an important factor in future developments in this region.

Huntington's proposition in *The Clash of Civilizations* that the concept

of nation would degenerate and there would be a power struggle over civilizations, in fact, implicated future religious conflicts. In this respect, some other experts also mention South Asia as the region with the lowest social integration in the world. However, our study also shows that people are no longer looking for conflict, especially internal ones, a demand that we should find very justified in South Asia. After all, this region represents a new trend in the global economy after 1980. Instead of collaborating and enhancing a shared economic prosperity, divergences would cost the region in the long run. Peace has been achieved in conflict-ridden countries of the region. Similarly, the people of the Kashmir region, over which India and Pakistan fought for years, do not want to be a party to this conflict.

The occurrence of such isolated incidents is very expected in such a fragile region. However, in a time period when the economic supply center is shifting 100 kilometers to Asia every year, people are not looking to destroy each other's cultures but rather seek higher standards of living. The people of South Asia are increasingly tolerant and consider outsiders as part of them. A rapid improvement is observable in all South Asian countries except Afghanistan. Therefore, a new dawn is breaking in the region in a direction opposite to what is known.

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ISLAMOPHOBIA IN INDIA

Dr. Hayati Ünlü

Introduction

Last year, on March 15 (2023), the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Indian Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj abstained from voting on the United Nations resolution aimed at fighting against Islamophobia (BM, 2024). The resolution was proposed by Pakistan in the UN General Assembly and supported by China. It condemned hostility, incitement, or any form of violence against Muslims worldwide. Furthermore, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was asked to appoint a United Nations special representative to combat Islamophobia (UN Resolution, 2024).

Ambassador Kamboj, while condemning acts of discrimination against Islam, emphasized the need to recognize that the dangers of “fear of religion” extend beyond Abrahamic faiths and added, “While the issue of Islamophobia is undoubtedly

significant, we must acknowledge that other religions are also facing discrimination and violence. Allocating resources solely to combat Islamophobia, while neglecting similar challenges faced by other faiths, might inadvertently perpetuate a sense of exclusion and inequality.” Ambassador Kamboj cautioned that adopting such resolutions could divide the UN along religious lines and steer the organization away from its mission of unity and harmony. She also reaffirmed India’s steadfast commitment to combating all forms of religious hatred. Despite India’s petition, the resolution was passed with 193 UN member states voting in favor and without opposition, though 44 countries—including India, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom—abstained.

The existence of threats to all faiths worldwide is an undeniable reality. However, on a day dedicated to combating Islamophobia, India’s stance has sparked debate, with criticism arguing that India’s actions reflect political ambitions to oppose any Pakistan-backed and pro-Islam resolution. To fully grasp the concerns raised by the Indian representative at the international forum, it is crucial to examine India’s internal religious dynamics. Decades of evidence highlight the widespread presence of Islamophobia in India, where threats against Muslims find a foothold not only at the societal level but also with documented involvement from state-backed organizations in such incidents.

Hate speech against Muslims in India has historical roots, but recent data indicates that Islamophobia has reached unprecedented levels. According to the India Hate Lab Report, an average of two anti-Muslim hate speech incidents occurred daily, totaling 668 reported cases. Notably, 63 percent of these incidents referenced Islamophobic conspiracy theories. These incidents surged during the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) political campaigns between August and November 2023. Nearly 43 percent of these cases were concentrated in key states, including Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. In August 2023, violence in Haryana’s Nuh district resulted in seven deaths and over 70 injuries. Additionally, in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, five Muslims were killed while protesting the demolition of a mosque and religious school (Singh, 2024).

Similarly, Hindutva Watch recorded 255 incidents of hate speech in-

citing violence and socio-economic boycotts against Muslims in the first half of 2023. Notably, 80 percent of these incidents occurred in states governed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Hindutva Watch, 2023). Hindu nationalists have frequently scapegoated Muslims for issues ranging from India's large population to the spread of COVID-19. In April 2020, a gathering organized by the Tablighi Jamaat in Delhi became the focus of an Islamophobic campaign, as it was blamed for triggering a cluster of COVID-19 cases. The BJP labeled the event a "super-spreader," while sensationalist headlines such as "Save the Country from Corona Jihad" dominated news networks and social media. Although nearly a thousand people were charged, courts later acquitted the prosecuted preachers, ruling that they had been "maliciously detained" under government directives (Bisht and Naqvi, 2020).

According to a report by Amnesty International, ten Muslim men have been lynched or killed in public since April 2017. In Maharashtra's Pusesavali village, a violent Hindu mob attacked a mosque, killing 31-year-old engineer Nurul Hasan Shikalgar (Amnesty International, 2017). Additionally, a Human Rights Watch report documented a tragic incident during the Hindu festival of Ram Navami, when armed Hindus marched through Muslim neighborhoods, chanting anti-Muslim slogans. Other attacks have targeted Muslim men accused of cow theft, elopement, or alleged relationships with Hindu women in states such as Assam, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. Human Rights Watch further reported that lynchings and hate speech against Muslims remain prevalent, with 36 Muslims killed in attacks between May 2015 and December 2018. On Indian WhatsApp groups, one in three posts mobilizes fear of Muslims and Islam. In Bihar, a radical Hindu group set fire to a 113-year-old madrasah library containing 4,500 books and ancient sacred inscriptions (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

This data raises the question of why Islamophobia, with roots in India dating back to the distant past, has escalated to unprecedented levels of violence today. The figures and events unfolding in India are often analyzed through a political lens, viewed as a consequence of extreme nationalism. From vandalizing restaurants in Gurugram, Haryana, to invoking Hamas to fuel anti-Muslim sentiment during recent crises, the rhetoric surrounding these actions fits within this broader context.

Policies such as revoking student scholarships for Muslims, passing discriminatory laws like the Citizenship Amendment Act, enforcing the “Uniform Civil Code” to ban the hijab, and enacting anti-conversion laws are considered state-sponsored measures targeting Muslims. Moreover, the oppression of other religious minorities, including Sikhs and Christians, highlights a broader pattern of religious discrimination that extends beyond just one community.

In this context, the first step of the analysis of Islamophobia in India will be an exploration of its historical roots and the factors that have contributed to its persistence into the modern era. Next, the issue will be examined through institutional, sociological, and cultural lenses, followed by an overview of the most significant violent incidents against Muslims. The discussion will then shift to the meaning of Islamophobia in the 21st century, highlighting its evolution from a national issue to a global concern. Finally, international responses to the rising wave of Islamophobia in India will be assessed, accompanied by an evaluation of the current situation.

Historical Roots

The literature indicates that Islamophobia and violence against Muslims in India have historical roots, with three primary factors often cited. The first is resentment stemming from the Muslim conquest of India in the Middle Ages. The second is linked to the divisive policies implemented by the British colonial government. The third revolves around the events following the partition of the Indian subcontinent into a Muslim-majority Pakistan and a Muslim-minority India.

The presence of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent dates back to the 7th century when Arab communities, for the first time, landed on Indian shores. Following clashes, Arabs eventually withdrew from the region (Anjum, 2007). Long before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab merchants were already conducting trade along the western coast of India. They began settling in the region in the 600s, welcomed by the local Hindu population. Over time, Muslim communities established settlements around trading posts and sought to spread Islam through peaceful conversions (Anjum, 2007).

Furthermore, Islamic empires have had a centuries-long presence in India. The Umayyad Empire, with its capital in present-day Syria, expanded into South-Central Asia in the early 8th century (Belmekki, 2008). Later, the Ghaznavid and Ghurid Empires emerged in the late 8th century, expanding across Asia for several centuries and reaching India in the 11th and 12th centuries, eventually extending into present-day Iran (Anjum, 2007). More extensive conquests led to increased migration into northern India by Afghans, Mongols, and Persians, bringing scholars and travelers who facilitated cultural exchanges between Muslims and Hindus (Anjum, 2007). As earlier empires dissolved in the late 12th century, the Delhi Sultanate rose to power, expanding its rule into southern India and ruling until the mid-1500s (Kumar, 2021). The Delhi Sultanate was eventually conquered by the Mughal Empire, which, seeking to avoid conflicts with the Iranians and Uzbeks in northern Pakistan and Afghanistan, expanded southeastward (Moynihan, 2023). Despite experiencing periods of decline—particularly from the early 1700s—the Mughal Empire remained dominant until the mid-19th century, effectively controlling much of the region.

The receiving and treatment of Hindus by various Muslim rulers and how contemporary Hindu nationalists interpret these interactions are crucial to understanding modern interfaith dynamics in India. When Arabs began to land in India in the 600s, there was no violence driven by religious ideology. Muslim traders, who lived in trading communities, gradually spread across villages in India, demonstrating Islamic values through their actions and peacefully converting nearby populations (Anjum, 2007). Muslim rulers during the Delhi Sultanate exhibited tolerance towards Hindus, recognizing their vital role in economic and civilizational stability (Klune, 2014). The rulers granted Hindus the status of “dhimmis,” a title that safeguarded the rights of non-Muslims in Islamic societies. While some rulers became harsher at times to maintain order, they had to balance their approach carefully—neither too tolerant nor too severe—in order to preserve control (Klune, 2014). This pattern largely continued under the Mughal rule, though in many regions, particularly in the north, such as Punjab, people lived under Muslim rule for centuries, with all faiths contributing to the construction of a shared civilization (Perrigo, 2020).

The violence and conquests that Hindu nationalists refer to today were

not solely motivated by religious reasons but were driven by political rivalries and power dynamics (Thaper, 2018). Nonetheless, religious differences became a convenient tool for dividing groups and inciting conflict. Hindu nationalists express their grievance that they were forcibly ruled by non-Hindu rulers for centuries. According to their perspective, the seemingly balanced and tolerant approach was only a façade, masking the reality that Hindus were subjugated by Muslims, who imposed their will on them as they saw fit. However, the root of this grievance is not entirely religious but deeply connected to caste dynamics. In fact, the core issue was that various castes were simply categorized as “Hindu” (Thaper, 2018). Even today, this situation is often used to justify violence against Muslims, particularly by upper-caste members, while the concept of the Untouchables (Dalits) is overlooked in discussions of religious violence committed by Hindus against Hindus.

The core source of Islamophobia here stems from the Muslims’ objective to convert Hindus and spread Islam. Historically, many Hindus in the country converted to Islam (Lal, 1990). It is often claimed that many Muslim empires, particularly the Mughals, forcibly converted large numbers of Hindus (Ushama, 2020). This provides a perspective on potential Hindu fear and animosity towards Islam. As Islam, by its nature, expands outward, Hindus, in turn, developed a literature centered around forced rule and conversion. Moreover, Hinduism, with its lack of rules promoting conversions, contrasts sharply with Islam, making Islam difficult to comprehend for Hindus. This situation has provided a dangerous justification for violence against Muslims, particularly those who were not keen on converting others by force. From this perspective, Hindu nationalist views appear to hold prejudice against Islam. While it is a considerable fact that not all conversions were forced, it is acknowledged that many lower-caste Hindus converted to Islam in despair and seeking better social and economic opportunities (Lal, 1990). Ultimately, the root cause of Islamophobia in India can be traced to centuries of Muslim rule, which was compounded by religious conversions from Hinduism.

British Colonial Rule and the Partition of the Subcontinent

The British arrived in India as traders under the auspices of the Mugh-

ls in the 1700s. However, as the Mughal Empire began to decline, the British gradually expanded from the costal areas into the interior. This new form of imperialism did not initially create strong disturbance in Hindus, who had experienced successive waves of foreign rule over the centuries (Anjum, 2007). Accepting British rule, Hindus learned the English language and embraced British educational systems and ideals. The British, in turn, fostered intellectual communities, organizations, and movements in Hindi, laying the groundwork for the rise of Hindu nationalism (Belmekki, 2008). Still, British rule also undermined the power of many Hindu princes and rulers. Meanwhile, Muslims faced economic decline and political exclusion, marking the beginning of a less prosperous era for them.

The British, in alliance with the Hindus, deepened the divide between the two religious communities, preventing them from uniting against colonial rule. By employing Hindus in roles such as tax collection, they facilitated the rise of a new class of elite landowners who, even during famines, overcharged Muslims, reducing them to peasants and serfs (Belmekki, 2008). Arguably, Muslim imperial pride may have further hindered their adaptation to the new rulers, as their sole focus was on the ruling, and they were accustomed to this dynamic, having no experience or willingness to accept foreign rule. When Muslims eventually revolted against British rule and failed, the British escalated their repression. Although Hindus also participated in the 1857 rebellion, the British disproportionately blamed Muslims, using this as justification for harsher measures, including torture, mass killings, exclusion from government positions, and increased surveillance (Belmekki, 2008). Determined to prevent unity between Muslims and Hindus against colonial rule, the British systematically oppressed Muslims to deepen divisions.

All of these developments ultimately benefited Hindus, some of whom welcomed the mistreatment of Muslims. A common conclusion regarding the origins of the Hindu-Muslim conflict is the pivotal role played by British colonial rule. While British policies exacerbated tensions, animosities had already existed, as Muslims had ruled over Hindus in much of India for centuries, naturally fostering resentment among some Hindus. Local conflicts had occurred long before the British arrived in the subcontinent (Verghese, 2018). However, the British amplified these

divisions by introducing the concept of the nation-state, which rigidly defined a single nation as the representative of society (Clark-Elsayed, 2022).

As British rule weakened, the subcontinent was partitioned into Pakistan (including present-day Bangladesh) and India. While various reasons have been cited for partition, the most widely discussed is the colonial strategy of “divide and rule.” The British ensured that a unified Indian subcontinent would not emerge, dividing the region into states based on religious ideology—one of the primary societal divisions they had recognized from the beginning (Tharoor, 2017). However, the Muslim League, a political party founded in 1906, along with other Muslim groups, actively demanded a separate homeland for Muslims. The divide-and-rule strategy prevented the formation of a unified India, leading to the deaths of millions, the displacement of over a dozen million people, and the destruction of billions of properties. Both Hindus and Muslims sought to protect their respective communities from violence (Singh Balla, 2019). Ultimately, partition was calculated as a rapid solution to hasten the separation of Muslims and Hindus.

Partition divided the Muslims of the subcontinent into three groups: those in Pakistan, those in the region that is now Bangladesh, and those who remained in India. Hindus sought to preserve their civilization by consolidating their history and position, while Muslim leaders argued that securing their rights required a separate state in the Northwest and East of India. Muslims who remained in India were not forcibly displaced by Hindu natives in favor of states-to-be-formed (Puri, 1993).

Post-independence India was founded on principles of democracy, minority rights, and secularism. However, Muslims remained considerably weak, withdrawing their demands for reservations in government and the economy and accepting Hindi as the official language (Puri, 1993). Although few political parties explicitly excluded members based on identity, the initial compliance of Indian Muslims did not last. By the late 1900s, they began protesting their grievances, particularly as their leaders either died or were imprisoned under suspicion of being threats to the state. However, due to the decline of the Muslim League and a resulting power vacuum, Muslims lacked sufficient political organization. Riots erupted across the subcontinent following the suppression of

protests in Kashmir over the theft of a relic believed to be the hair of the Prophet Muhammad (Puri, 1993). This eventually contributed to the first Indo-Pakistani war in 1965, which further strained the position of Muslims in India, as they were now associated with the actions of other Muslims. Although they did not harbor the same hostility toward Pakistan as many Hindus did, they frequently faced accusations of disloyalty to India. By the late 1900s, Indian Muslims became more confident in asserting their identity, leading to multiple protests over the decades in defense of Urdu, Muslim civil law, a historically Muslim university, and other key aspects of their faith and culture (Puri, 1993).

Over time, these efforts provoked increasing pressure from both the state and Hindu nationalist groups, resulting in a broader push to suppress Muslim-led protests and riots and Muslim resistance to preserve their distinct identity and practices. While some measures promoting equality were introduced, the dominant trend has been an uneasy tolerance in some areas, juxtaposed with extreme patterns of violence by Hindu nationalist groups. Over the decades, pro-Hindu government leaders such as Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi increasingly embraced Hindu majoritarianism, creating favorable conditions within the legislature for the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Maizland, 2022).

Institutional, Sociological, and Cultural Factors

Islamophobia in India is considered to be supported by institutional, sociological, and cultural factors, with anti-Muslim violence often characterized as politically motivated and organized “pogroms” or “riots.” In this context, the role of the constitution as an institution is central to discussions on Islamophobia. India’s seventy-five-year-old constitution formally enshrined egalitarian principles such as social equality and non-discrimination, with the term “secular” added to the preamble in 1976. The literature highlights that leaders of the Congress Party, who fought for independence, envisioned an India that recognized all citizens and beliefs equally. For example, Mahatma Gandhi, who advocated for a united and non-discriminatory India, was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist in 1948. Similarly, India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, saw secularism as essential to building a peaceful society and preventing another tragedy following partition. Many Con-

gress leaders, including Nehru, regarded those who sought to divide India along religious lines—particularly Hindu groups—as the country’s greatest threat (Maizland, 2022).

However, studies on anti-Muslim violence and Islamophobia in India have argued that Islamophobia was embedded in the nation-building process from the outset, with institutions such as the constitution being part of this framework. These studies reject narratives that deny the existence of Islamophobia, limit its scope to the actions of Hindu nationalist groups, or frame their rise as an anomaly within India’s secular and multicultural trajectory. Instead, they argue that Islamophobia should be understood as a rejection of Muslim political subjectivity, asserting that Hindutva is not an aberration but a continuation of India’s nation-building project, in which Muslims have been systematically positioned as the “other.” By analyzing the socio-economic experience of the Muslim community, these arguments highlight the systemic nature of anti-Muslim violence and social inequality (Kattiparambil, 2023).

Another critical dimension of institutional support for Islamophobia is its connection to political parties and organizations, particularly those linked to the Hindu nationalist volunteer militia, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena, which serve as the political wings of the RSS, have been accused of complicity in anti-Muslim violence and of leveraging such violence as part of a broader electoral strategy. For example, research by Raheel Dhattiwala and Michael Biggs found that killings were significantly higher in areas where the BJP faced strong electoral opposition than in regions where it already had a stronghold. Notably, in 1989, organized attacks against Muslims surged in northern India, coinciding with the BJP’s growing success in local and state elections (Dhattiwala and Biggs, 2002). Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah identified the violence in Bhagalpur in 1989, Hashimpura in 1987, and Moradabad in 1980 as premeditated massacres (Tambiah, 1997). Similarly, Ram Puniyani argued that Shiv Sena won elections in Maharashtra in the 1990s due to violent events, just as the BJP consolidated power in Gujarat following the 2002 violence. In this context, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence, which have intensified in recent years, have been linked to the Hindutva ideology, which envisions non-Hindu citizens as holding a second-class status (Puniyani, 2003).

Hindu nationalists have justified violence against Muslims by citing historical subjugation, as well as mobilizing cultural, demographic, and economic factors. They argue that since partition, Indian Muslims have remained allied with Pakistan and have been continuously radicalized, necessitating defensive measures to prevent the repetition of past wrongdoings. A recurring theme in Hindu nationalist discourse is the higher fertility rate among Muslims, which they allege is part of a deliberate effort to turn Hindus into a minority in their own country (Weigl, 2012). Hindu nationalist political actors, such as the BJP, have emphasized the critical role of demographics in Indian elections. They contend that constituencies with a higher percentage of Muslims are more likely to influence centrist parties to accommodate minority demands, which, in turn, purportedly reduces the chances of fostering Muslims' "constructing a bridge" with their neighbors. Within this framework, "tolerance toward Muslims" has been framed as a contributing factor to sectarian violence (Varshney, 2003).

Another key motivation for parties such as the BJP and Shiv Sena to incite violence against Muslims is considered to be cultural nationalism. For example, Shiv Sena was complicit in the violence in Bhiwandi, Maharashtra, in 1984, as well as in Bombay in 1992 and 1993. Anti-Muslim violence has also had consequences for Hindus living outside India. Since the 1950s, there have been retaliatory attacks against Hindus in Kashmir, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in response to anti-Muslim violence in India. Following the 1992 violence in Bombay, Hindu temples were attacked in Britain, Dubai, and Thailand (Chandavarkar, 2009). These incidents have reinforced anti-Muslim sentiment in India, further strengthening Hindu nationalist movements. Hindutva discourse increasingly portrays Muslims as traitors and enemies of the state whose patriotism is suspect. Sumit Ganguly has argued that the rise in terrorism can be attributed to violence by Hindutva forces, as recurring cycles of violence have entrenched divisions between Muslim and Hindu communities, becoming a solid, conventional pattern (Ganguly, 2003).

Another factor contributing to these outbreaks of violence is deemed to be the upward mobility of lower castes amid economic expansion. Here, violence has functioned as a substitute for class tensions. Rather than addressing the demands of lower-class groups, Hindu nationalists have framed Muslims and Christians as "not truly Indian" due to their

religion and have glorified perpetrators of violence as “heroes” protecting the majority from “anti-nationalists” (Metcalf, 2006). According to Omar Khalidi, anti-Muslim violence is deliberately orchestrated to economically and socially cripple Muslims, ultimately forcing their assimilation into the lower echelons of Hindu society (Puniyani, 2003). Similarly, Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph have argued that economic inequality contributes to Hindu aggression against Muslims. As India’s economy has expanded due to globalization and foreign investments, the Hindu population’s expectations have often outpaced available opportunities, leading to scapegoating of Muslims and fueling unrest (Price, 2012).

The Largest Islamophobic Violence Outbreaks

Muslims in India face systemic discrimination in employment, education, and housing and appealed to protests to secure justice when denied access to basic services such as healthcare (Maizland, 2022). However, these protests have remained peaceful. In contrast, history has witnessed numerous violent incidents targeting Muslims, reshaping the whole social landscape of the country. One of the most notable outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence was the 1992 Babri Masjid incident. Disputes over the mosque in the northern city of Ayodhya, which Hindus claimed was built on the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram by a Mughal general in the 16th century, escalated to a fatal degree in the 1990s. In the deadliest religious clashes since partition, Hindu militants demolished the mosque in 1992, triggering riots that resulted in the killing of approximately 3,000 people, the majority of which are Muslims (Metcalf, 2009). The Modi administration laid the foundation stone for a new Hindu temple at the site in 2020 after the Supreme Court approved its construction, and the temple, still unfinished, was inaugurated months before the 2024 general elections.

The Gujarat Riots of 2002 marked another defining moment in India’s socio-political trajectory following the Babri Masjid incident. After a train carrying Hindu pilgrims from Ayodhya to Gujarat in the west caught fire, clashes erupted nationwide with dozens of casualties. Hindu extremists, claiming that Muslims had set the train ablaze, retaliated by killing hundreds of Muslims, raping Muslim women, and vandalizing Muslim businesses and places of worship. Then Gujarat Chief

Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP faced widespread criticism from opposition politicians, human rights groups, and lawmakers from various countries for failing to prevent and, in some cases, encouraging the violence. An Indian government investigation concluded that the train fire was accidental, though conflicting reports suggested it was arson (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012).

Hopes that large-scale communal violence would subside were dashed by the Muzaffarnagar Riots of 2013. More than sixty people were killed in clashes near Muzaffarnagar after two Hindu men were killed in a fight with Muslim men. Approximately 50,000 people, mostly Muslims, were displaced, with many forced to live in relief camps for months—some never returning home (Berenschot, 2014). In the post-Muzaffarnagar period, Hindu mob attacks became so frequent that the Supreme Court of India warned they could become the “new normal.” One of the most common forms of anti-Muslim violence emerged through “cow protection” vigilante groups, which targeted Muslims engaged in cattle trading or slaughter, a practice many Hindus deem sacrilegious. According to a 2019 Human Rights Watch report, at least forty-four people, mostly Muslims, were killed by these groups. Additionally, Hindu nationalist groups propagated the idea of “love jihad,” accusing Muslim men of seducing Hindu women to convert them to Islam, leading again assaults against Muslim men. Hundreds of Muslim men have also been arrested under anti-conversion laws enacted in BJP-led states to curb so-called love jihad (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

By the 2020s, violence had become a central tool in the political playbook, with the 2020 New Delhi riots serving as another stark example. Clashes erupted as Muslims and others protested the Citizenship Amendment Act, resulting in around fifty deaths, most of them Muslims, in the worst sectarian violence in the capital in decades. Reportedly, some BJP politicians incited the violence, and police failed to intervene to stop Hindu mobs from attacking Muslims (Gettleman and Abi-Habib, 2020). A 2021 Human Rights Watch report found that authorities charged more than a dozen protesters but failed to investigate police complicity (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Similarly, in May 2022, derogatory comments about the Prophet Muhammad by two BJP officials sparked deadly protests across India and condemnation from Muslim-majority countries. Although the BJP dismissed those respon-

sible, similar sectarian violence resurfaced during the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, built on the former site of the Babri Masjid, ahead of the 2024 General Elections. Despite the temple's expected completion in late 2024, BJP supporters and Hindu nationalist groups took to the streets in support of its construction, soon leading to the eruption of yet another communal violence in northeastern India (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Islamophobia in the 21st-Century India

Hindu nationalism as an ideological movement is often traced back to the colonial-era writings of V. D. Savarkar, particularly his book *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* Hindu nationalists believe that Hindus are the “true sons of the soil” because their sacred lands are in India, unlike Christians and Muslims, whose holy places lie outside the subcontinent. They have generally advocated for policies aimed at transforming India into a Hindu state, often viewing Indian Muslims with suspicion despite the fact that many are descendants of Hindus who converted to Islam. The partition of India and the creation of Pakistan are frequently cited by Hindu nationalists as the ultimate evidence of Muslim disloyalty (Jaffrelot, 2019).

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is in power today, was founded in 1980 but traces its lineage to the National Volunteer Union (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh - RSS), a Hindu nationalist paramilitary volunteer group. However, the 21st-century version of Islamophobia in India was shaped after the September 11 attacks in 2001. Just as global Islamophobia surged in response to these attacks, India experienced a parallel rise in anti-Muslim sentiment and the global anti-Islamic discourse with a “terrorism” agenda claiming the need for increased arrests and killings of alleged radical Muslims overlapped with Hindutva agenda (Ahmad, 2014). Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, became a central figure in this landscape, particularly following the 2002 Gujarat riots. His ability to consolidate Hindu support in Gujarat served as a model for national politics, and under his leadership, the BJP successfully expanded its political base (Ellis-Peterson, 2023). Modi's tenure also saw the adoption of a neoliberal economic model, often referred to as the “Gujarat Model,” which emphasized rapid economic growth

and bridged gaps between traditionalists and aspirational middle-class Hindus (George, 2022). Later, to maintain political dominance, broader support was required from lower-caste Hindus, and to achieve this, Muslims were once again positioned as the common enemy. Strengthened by a combination of factors, including the global war on terror, ongoing tensions with Pakistan, the Babri Masjid dispute, historical narratives of Muslim conquest, and social division based on the idea that India is a Hindu state, Modi first ascended to power in 2014 and secured re-election in 2019 and 2024, using slogans such as “India is only for Hindus” to mobilize support.

Modi’s tenure in Indian politics has undoubtedly coincided with a marked increase in the visibility and normalization of Islamophobia. Feeling no need to conceal its Islamophobic sentiments, the Modi administration was able to revoke Jammu and Kashmir’s semi-autonomous status in 2019, followed by harsh crackdowns on the political opposition in the regions aspiring for independence and arrests of thousands (Silverstein, 2020). At the same time, regional policies in Kashmir were centered on regional militarism and various practices, including sexual violence, economic repression, and internet blackouts, all of which have significantly disrupted daily life. In response to Hindu-led communal violence, the BJP’s Home Minister defended the demolition of Muslim homes and businesses by claiming they were built illegally or in sacred spaces (Tazamal, 2022).

Another arrangement facilitating the surge of Islamophobia in the Modi era is undoubtedly the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The law offered fast-track citizenship to immigrants from neighboring countries, but only if they were non-Muslim. The Hindu nationalist government justified this exclusion by arguing that religious minorities in Muslim-majority nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan needed protection from persecution (Tripathi, 2019). However, critics have argued that this policy reinforced an anti-Muslim agenda by portraying Muslims as inherently oppressive while depicting other religious groups as victims of persecution, lacking access to objective judicial processes without harassment and violence, and facing systemic discrimination (Chaudhry, 2019).

The Covid-19 pandemic introduced yet another dimension to Islam-

ophobia in India. In March 2020, during the outbreak of the pandemic, the Tablighi Jamaat, a Muslim organization, held a large gathering in New Delhi, which many delegates from various parts of the country attended (Ahuja and Banerjee, 2021). Although this could be taken as irresponsible behavior, unaware of the severity of the Covid-19 crisis, other religious congregations had also taken place at that time (Perrigo, 2020). Capitalizing on the opportunity, Hindu nationalists first initiated a complaint movement on the respective organization, which later turned into a massive hate campaign. Right-wing media amplified anti-Muslim sentiment through hashtags like “#CoronaJihad,” spreading misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric (Perrigo, 2020). The pandemic response in India soon became deeply polarized along religious lines (Ahuja & Banerjee, 2021). The patients were segregated based on religion in hospitals; Muslim patients were denied medical treatment and subjected to random quarantines. In short, the Covid-19 pandemic facilitated another Islamophobic wave in India.

To summarize, strong evidence exists to assert that Islamophobia is still alive and dynamic in 21st-century India. While the root causes of this phenomenon continue to be debated, scholars increasingly acknowledge that status quo hatred stems from the fact that Islamophobia is an “industrially produced” tool of political control (Ushama, 2020). In other words, political leaders systematically manufacture and manipulate anti-Muslim sentiment to consolidate power, which is also deemed to be a possible method of diverting attention from the existing material and social inequalities in India. The historical foundations of this strategy are clear—rather than fostering national unity, Hindu nationalists have pursued a policy of selective unification, rallying parts of India against others. This tactic, whether consciously or unconsciously adopted, mirrors the British colonial strategy of divide and rule.

Internationalization of Islamophobia

Until the Modi era, Islamophobia in India was largely confined within its borders and primarily used as a political tool to unite the Hindu majority around a common enemy. However, under Modi’s leadership, India has demonstrated that its Islamophobic tactics can extend its sources and impact, influencing India’s international politics. One of

the most striking examples of this shift is India's vocal support for Israel. Prime Minister Modi was among the first world leaders to condemn Hamas' attacks, openly aligning himself with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and supporting in the face of terrorism. India subsequently abstained from supporting a ceasefire at the UN General Assembly (Sharma, 2023). Still, there are different opinions on Israel in the Indian government and the BJP, and the administration's support for Zionism using its power created controversy. While economic and strategic interests in the Middle East—such as maintaining stability for Indian workers in the region—are key factors in India's stance, Hindu nationalism has played a significant role in shaping the government's and many citizens' perspectives on the issue (Markey, 2023). Hindu nationalists and Zionists have found common ground in perceiving their nations as embattled civilizations threatened by Islam, thus creating a Hindu sympathy for Israel. This marks another example where Hindu nationalists capitalized on every opportunity to reinforce their hatred against Muslims, similar to the case of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Indian social media has further fueled Islamophobia on a global scale, primarily due to the country's active diaspora, which remains loyal to nationalist sentiments and prime-minister Modi. Many radical social media accounts based in India have denied Israeli responsibility for hospital bombings in Gaza and attributed them to Hamas despite evidence to the contrary (Hourany, 2023). This highlights the extent to which disinformation has permeated the respective conflict. In the Gulf region, the Hindu diaspora pursued a hateful campaign against Muslims in India, Islam, and Muslims in general, leading to such an outcry that the United Arab Emirates issued a public warning against discrimination, and several Indians lost their jobs due to their Islamophobic online posts (Zhou, 2020). Similarly, in Canada, massive reactions have risen by the Hindu diaspora, opposing pro-Muslim policies, with numerous fake accounts detected spreading anti-Muslim disinformation, culminating in Canada's inclusiveness call to Muslims and all parties involved. Moreover, in late 2023, a Sikh separatist leader was assassinated in British Columbia, prompting Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to suggest possible Indian involvement. While no concrete evidence was presented, concerns have been raised that India's suppression model against separatist leaders could extend globally (Ellis-Peterson,

2023). Accordingly, the loyal Hindu diaspora's attempts to prevent any criticism by Western politicians towards India or Modi drew considerable attention. Indeed, Canada stayed silent for the next Islamophobic wave in which 50 people were killed in India, a trend also continued in Modi's revoking of Kashmir's constitutionally autonomous status and other issues (Zhou, 2020).

The reach and organizational networks of the Indian media, as well as the diaspora, have also been observed to directly or indirectly increase Islamophobia in many countries. The studies concur that the capacity here comprises the management of an extensive Indian influence network with over 265 fake local news websites in over 65 countries (Alaphilippe et al., 2019). This includes outlets with anti-Pakistan stories on Kashmir and several newspapers like "timesofgeneva.com" that report similar news. It is acknowledged that lobbies are another way for India to internationalize its Islamophobic sentiments, and the Indian lobby network in the US has observably turned to the established Israeli lobby machine for guidance, increasing the already predominantly Hindu nationalist sentiments (Morgan, 2023).

International Reaction against Islamophobia in India

India has largely remained reluctant to acknowledge its growing Islamophobic narrative on the global stage. According to Ambassador Zahir Akram, during his tenure as UN Permanent Representative in Geneva, Indian representatives—particularly at the Human Rights Council—rarely, if ever, admitted to any discrimination against Indian Muslims. The UN Human Rights Office has labeled India's treatment of its Muslim population as "functionally discriminatory" and urged the country to uphold its human rights commitments. Despite these calls, India has repeatedly defended itself against allegations of human rights abuses and the use of torture, maintaining that it upholds human rights values (Makhija, 2022).

India's continued reluctance to acknowledge Islamophobic violence has fueled discussions about its shift toward authoritarianism and state-sponsored discrimination. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), along with an alliance of Muslim-majority nations at the

UN, has formally condemned the rising attacks on Muslims and Islamic sites in India. However, India dismissed these condemnations as part of an “anti-India agenda” and accused the OIC of displaying a “communal mentality” that undermined its credibility (Morgan, 2023). This response reinforced India’s pattern of refusing to acknowledge accusations of religious discrimination, even when challenged on a public platform. Some OIC members have attempted to engage India by advocating for its inclusion in the organization, with Saudi Arabia proposing observer status and Bangladesh and Qatar supporting membership (Robbi, 2022). However, India has consistently rejected these invitations, refraining from the religious character of the organization and potential pressures on the Kashmir issue. India has also been wary of joining any international cooperation based on Islam, opting instead for bilateral diplomacy to safeguard its sovereignty and security.

A notable instance of backlash from the Muslim world against India occurred when a BJP official publicly insulted the Prophet Muhammad. A major Kuwaiti supermarket chain pulled Indian products from its shelves, Qatar demanded an apology from India’s visiting Vice President, Bahrain welcomed the removal of the BJP official, and Iran summoned the Indian ambassador for an apology, and several other Muslim-majority nations also expressed their disapproval. At this point, India was startled and sent diplomats to key Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other countries to defuse tensions (Vanand, 2022). This marked a notable shift in India’s foreign policy trend. India was forced to swiftly engage in damage control diplomacy and take other measures to diminish hostilities. It changed its political model because the scale of public anger in these countries to take a firm stance was unprecedented. This new reaction prompted the governments to express their outrage extensively.

India’s strategy was impacted by shifts in power dynamics and economic relations, illustrated by India’s increasing reliance on trade and economic cooperation—particularly with countries in the Gulf region. For instance, trade between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) doubled in 2022, primarily in oil and gas (Solanki, 2024). Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become India’s third and fourth-largest trading partners, respectively. Major infrastructure investment projects and the presence of the Indian diaspora of millions in the Gulf have

further deepened economic ties (Ganguly and Blarel, 2020). Following India's revoking of Kashmir's special status, Saudi Arabia and the UAE continued their economic cooperation with the country, describing it as an "internal matter." However, there is growing discussion about the increasing leverage that Muslim-majority countries have in response to India's Islamophobic policies. India's dependence on Gulf nations for energy imports—especially after Russia's exports declined following the Ukraine crisis—has heightened this dynamic. While many Muslim-majority states traditionally avoid direct intervention in India's domestic affairs, their strong reactions to incidents such as insulting the Prophet Muhammad demonstrated their ability to pressure India when provoked.

India's relationship with Türkiye, another influential Muslim-majority country, has also been strained due to Islamophobia-related tensions. Following President Erdoğan's remarks on the Kashmir conflict, India threatened to cancel a multi-billion-dollar joint production agreement with Türkiye in 2019, evoking the need for India-Pakistan cooperation (Siddiqui, 2020). India's response reflected its longstanding position of opposing third-party involvement in Kashmir and finding a resolution with Pakistan. However, the agreement was maintained when India tried to leverage Türkiye more, not only to mitigate its stance on India but also to scale down Turkish-Pakistani cooperation. The following year on the anniversary of evoking Kashmir's status, Turkish government officials made public statements, and President Erdoğan refrained from this, and the Türkiye-Pakistan relations were increased to a strategic partnership (Siddiqui, 2020). In 2020, Türkiye hosted academics and researchers to discuss India's anti-Muslim policies, an initiative that India accused of promoting the radicalization of Indian Muslims. Although economic cooperation between the two countries has continued, their engagement on issues related to Indian Muslims has remained minimal. At the G20 Summit in India, Erdoğan called on world leaders to reassess policies that permitted the desecration of the Holy Quran by burning under police protection (Güldoğan, 2023). Currently, India-Türkiye relations remain less grounded for deeper cooperation as Islamophobia in India continues to pose a significant obstacle.

Indonesia, one of the world's largest Muslim-majority countries and an emerging regional power has developed a growing strategic, security,

and economic partnership with India. Both nations share an interest in avoiding interference, as seen in their respective positions on Kashmir and Papua, given their own internal security concerns. However, India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) sparked a backlash among Indonesian Islamic organizations, leading to protests outside the Indian embassy and public pressure on the Indonesian government (Robby, 2022). The Ulema Council, Indonesia's state-sponsored supreme religious body, invited the Indian ambassador to a meeting with Indonesian Islamic organizations to clarify India's position, but the ambassador did not attend (Robby, 2022). Several Indonesian officials, including members of parliament and the Minister of Religious Affairs, voiced concerns over India's treatment of its Muslim community. Despite this, Indonesia's official stance remained non-interventionist, treating the matter as India's internal affair, and consequently, cooperation between the two countries remained largely unaffected (Robby, 2022). Therefore, the non-intervention and territorial sovereignty model persisted, and other more profitable strategic cooperation venues, such as trade and diplomacy, took precedence.

Malaysia, another economically strong, predominantly Muslim country, has exhibited a broader range of responses to India's Islamophobic policies, albeit constrained by the presence of a sizable Indian diaspora in the country. According to a study evaluating the Islamophobia configuration of non-Muslim Malaysians of Indian origin, Islamophobia among this sample has persisted regardless of the level of their exposure to Muslim communities (Siah, Low, Anis, and Tan, 2022). Malaysia, under Mahathir Mohamad's leadership, took a firmer stance, advocating for a UN-mandated approach to address the Kashmir issue and in retaliation, India imposed a ban on palm oil imports from Malaysia (Robby, 2022). This pattern continued with the Citizenship Amendment Act, as Mahathir's remarks were perceived as derogatory and were met with expanded trade restrictions. As other Malaysian government officials echoed these concerns, a considerable number of members of the Malaysian government lost their prestige in the Indian eyes. In 2022, Malaysia's Foreign Minister warned that India's Islamophobic policies could negatively impact Muslim communities across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and urged India to collaborate with Malaysia in addressing this issue (Dunia, 2023).

When discussing India's Islamophobia, it is impossible to overlook Pakistan and Bangladesh. India's already damaged image in Pakistan has deteriorated further with each instance of state-sanctioned communal violence against Muslims. Hindu nationalism has hindered bilateral engagements of any nature (Syed, 2023). The revocation of Kashmir's autonomous status prompted Pakistan to call for international reaction, arguing that India had violated the rights of the Kashmiri people. With the Kashmir tension developed, India stripped Pakistan of its Most Favored Nation (MFN) status (Syed, 2023). These actions align with India's broader strategy of eliminating perceived threats and securing the Hindu nationalist country. Pakistani administration has openly objected to the continuation of this conjunctural conflict. This is one of the main Pakistani instruments to respond to Islamophobia in India: name and shame. It consistently exposes India's anti-Muslim practices in the UN General Assembly and calls upon other Muslim countries to collaborate against rising Islamophobia (Latif, 2020). These efforts have hardly curbed Islamophobia as it is also Pakistan that primarily obstacles India's accession to OIC.

In Bangladesh, a significant regional actor with a history of division as a Muslim-majority country following the colonial period, thousands of protesters took to the streets after BJP politicians insulted Prophet Muhammad; however, the Bangladeshi government remained silent in condemning India (Mahmud, 2022). This stance was attributed mainly to the deep ties between the Hasina administration and India. The administration openly stated that it did not want to offend India, which sparked internal quarrels. The protestors called for a boycott of Indian products until India altered its Islamophobic policies (Mahmud, 2022). This political landscape shifted after the Hasina administration was overthrown, leading to a period of crisis in Bangladesh-India relations. The protests in the process of the overthrowing of the Hasina government and Hasina's escape to India fueled the anti-India sentiment as well as debates on both Islamophobia and Hinduphobia. Allegations that India had deliberately opened floodgates after heavy rains, causing severe flooding in Bangladesh, further exacerbated tensions. As a result, discussions on Islamophobia have remained a central issue in the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The discussions on Islamophobia in India can be expanded to many

countries, especially the US reports on the elimination of religious freedom in the country. However, a critical point here is the fact that Islamophobia has brought Muslim countries closer together globally. Türkiye, Iran, Iraq and Malaysia have started to collaborate more closely together and have all increased their bilateral meetings to coordinate increased cooperation at the UN General Assembly. Türkiye and Malaysia have worked together on a speech condemning the rise of Islamophobia globally, and developing strategies to combat it bilaterally emerged as a central agenda item during President Erdoğan's visit to Malaysia (Tuğtekin, 2023). Pakistan has also joined this alliance to work on an anti-Islamophobia television to have a media presence that educates people and combats the growing misconceptions about Islam (Gul, 2019). Therefore, India's insistence on perpetuating Islamophobic behavior will expectedly result in pushing its potential partners and allies towards countries like Pakistan and Iran.

Conclusion

The rise of Islamophobia in India is deeply rooted in its historical trajectory—centuries of Muslim inflow, control, and rule, and British colonial policies that exacerbated Hindu-Muslim divisions to rule them more easily. These have provided fertile ground for the BJP to leverage Islamophobia as a tool for political consolidation. Nowadays, BJP and Prime Minister Modi have been accused of enacting policies that violate the rights of Indian Muslims, suppressing protests, enabling Hindu nationalist violence, and limiting economic opportunities for Muslims compared to their Hindu counterparts. Internationally, Islamophobia is a component of India's foreign policy. India has emerged as a vocal supporter of other countries with strong Islamophobic policies, such as Israel, while also mobilizing segments of the loyal Hindu nationalist diaspora, lobbying networks, and Hindu nationalist organizations to influence foreign policy decisions in its favor. These efforts also include deterring the opposition from criticizing the Indian government and ensuring that policies in other nations align with India's interests.

The Muslim world has multidimensionally and unilaterally raised its voice against India's Islamophobic policies, yet with minimal impact. This is mainly because, like the US, they prefer to ensure that their in-

ternational interests are met rather than their values. In other words, secure access to India's economy is preferable to fighting India for its Islamophobic actions. India is extremely defensive when criticized for Islamophobia, so these concerns are based on the possibility of retaliation. India is a rising power, but whether it can consolidate itself as a great power remains a matter of debate. India's Islamophobic behavior is preventing better alliances with much of the world; tensions hinder trust and flexibility in relations, especially if the public is more vocal or conflicted with the Indian diaspora. This increase in Islamophobia corresponds to an intensifying distrust of many other countries as well as a decline in democracy, making India more aggressive internationally and risking undermining good relations with Muslim countries.

India's disenfranchising of nearly 280 million Muslims—one-fifth of India's 1.5 billion population—will expectedly damage India's sustainable economic growth and ability to become a global economic power. Also, it is expected that India's BJP government will continue its Islamophobic strategy and build a viable atmosphere for more violence. This is another prospect that will hinder India's ability to become a global power safely. India's international image is rapidly deteriorating, and if it does not, for example, curb its radical rhetoric or use its economy to shield itself from criticism, it may find itself gradually losing alliances on the world stage.

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MIGRATION AND REFUGEE MOVEMENT

Assoc. Prof. Ömer ASLAN

Introduction

The fact that migration flows are one of the most characteristic features of South Asia stems from nation-state building efforts, political instability, poverty and economic inequality, increasing population, the difficulty of border controls, and external military interventions. Migration flows in South Asia can be divided into four:

- Primarily considerable is regular, legal migration prompted by Britain's grant of the unrestricted right of entry to its former colonies based on the 1948 Nationality Act, aiming to eliminate the labor shortage in the country. This connection enabled many Indian and Pakistani citizens to settle in Britain. Regular migration between Europe and South Asia also takes place through the Bangladesh-Italy connection. Today, Italy is the country with the largest Bangladeshi pop-

ulation after Britain (Zorko, 2018, 198-199).

- Ongoing cross-border migration waves induced by conflicts between regional countries. Examples of this type include the large population movements that occurred between India and Pakistan during the process when the two countries emerged as two separate nation-states and the millions of East Bengalis who migrated to India during the 1971 civil war in East Pakistan (in which India later got involved), triggering the process leading to the establishment of Bangladesh. It is noteworthy that during the partition of India, twelve million people were displaced in Punjab alone and twenty million people (Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, etc.) in the entire subcontinent— a human mobility the extent of which was observed only during the Second World War (Fazila Yacoobali-Zamindar, 2007, p.6). Evocable also is the Afghans who took refuge in Pakistan and Iran or were internally displaced by force as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.
- Internal migration waves (displaced people) due to domestic separatist movements/terrorism/fight against terrorism. Millions of people had to leave their homes at different periods as a result of military operations carried out by states/central authorities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, or Afghanistan in the name of fighting against terrorism/separatist movements.
- Economically induced voluntary, state-supported legal migration or economically induced irregular migration without state support. Although both types are essentially 'involuntary' migrations, South Asia hosts a vast population of economic migrants who go abroad to work. India was ranked in 2022 as the country receiving the largest remittances, totaling \$111 billion. In South Asia, where the remittances are of great importance to the national economies, states export their workforce, and thus regulate and encourage economic migration. Special administrative units have been established for the export of labor in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. On the other hand, there are millions of South Asians who, driven by the lack of job opportunities and poverty in their own countries, had to migrate to richer countries with the help of smugglers.

In the following years, these migration movements themselves and the migrant population became an essential dynamic in the relations among the countries of the region. For example, it is impossible to evaluate the

decisions of the Pakistani and Iranian governments to send back to Afghanistan the Afghans who took refuge in these countries after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and whose numbers naturally increased with new migrations over the years, independently of the recent developments in Pakistan-Afghanistan and Iran-Afghanistan relations. The deep ethnic diversity of the region combined with the concerns about citizenship and identity stemming from the arbitrarily designated national borders in the colonial period have resulted in most South Asian countries being alarmed by human mobility. For example, the seven million East Bengalis who took refuge in India during the 1971 Civil War caused great concern because they were considered both an economic burden to India and an amplifying factor to the social problems in West Bengal (CIA, 1971). On the other hand, it should also be noted that India intervened militarily in East Pakistan using the refugee flow induced by the turmoil in East Pakistan as an excuse. Another instance where migration played an important role in interstate relations is India's hosting of tens of thousands of Tibetans who took refuge in the country in 1959 under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, granting them full citizenship rights and residence opportunities—a practice denied to other ethnic groups that took refuge in the country. Murshid (2014, 77-78) states that this policy stems not from India's humanitarian stance towards refugees fleeing Chinese persecution but from the Dalai Lama's international status and its motive to use Tibetans against China.

In 2024, India's decision to amend the Citizenship Act after many years and open the door for citizenship to non-Muslims, i.e., Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist groups, who had sought refuge in India from Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh in the past, declared a rejection of Muslims as citizens. India has left Bangladesh facing the possibility of repatriating a large number of people who cannot prove their religious identity (Hindustan Times, 2020). As illustrated by the examples of the Biharis, who have been living in 'temporary' camps in Bangladesh since 1971 and who are suspected of being loyal to Pakistan because their mother tongue is Urdu, and the Afghans, who have been living in Pakistan since 1979, citizenship is not easily acquired in South Asian countries. Neither Pakistan, India, nor Bangladesh have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. As a result, Rohingya, Afghan, Bangladeshi, Hindu, or Buddhist refugees in these countries remain trapped

between the statuses of ‘illegal immigrant’ and ‘temporary guest,’ preventing them from obtaining citizenship through established processes, as in other countries.

Migration in the Gulf-South Asia Relations

South Asian countries attach great importance to exporting labor due to their high population sizes and limited economic opportunities. The remittances sent to these countries help to alleviate the national foreign exchange gap, provide for the livelihood of many households, reduce unemployment, and prevent poverty from spinning out of control. It is also necessary to realize that the state interests lie behind the replacement of Egyptian and Palestinian workers, who have long met the labor needs of the Gulf region, by South Asians. As Tsaroupas (2019) also suggested, the Gulf countries’ increased motivation to meet their labor needs from non-‘ideological’ South Asian countries stems from the fact that Egypt, during the Nasser period, actively used Egyptian workers in the Gulf as spreaders of Arab nationalism, while Palestinians pressured and strained the Gulf regimes for the Palestinian struggle. Pakistani workers sent goods and remittances back to Pakistan but did not carry ideologies that would disrupt stability in the countries where they worked, nor did they ever pose a destabilizing element there.

According to World Migration Report 2024 (p. 73) by the International Organization for Migration, three countries in South Asia (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) are the countries with the highest remittance inflows in the world. The amount of remittances transferred to India by Indians living abroad in 2022 was \$111 billion, and India is the country that sends the most international migrants annually. 25% of Nepal’s gross domestic product comprises the remittances sent by Nepalese living abroad. This ratio is around 8-10% for Pakistan. On the one hand, this situation offers important opportunities for these countries, but on the other, it has created, as a 1983 CIA report noted, regional dependency between South Asia and the Middle East. Although the CIA (1983a) report refers to the Middle East in the assessment, a significant portion of economic migration from South Asia is, in fact, directed to the Gulf region. During periods when oil prices fall, the demand for workers in the Gulf decreases, and the dependency between the Gulf and South

Asia is especially conducive at those times to engender economic difficulties in South Asian countries. The most explicit manifestation of this dependency was the years when hundreds of thousands of South Asian workers were forced to return to their countries due to the economic recession in the Gulf region induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse effects on labor demand. While this practice suddenly increased the unemployment line in the respective countries, it also caused a significant decrease in the remittances transferred.

Thus, 'migration' has an important place in the diplomatic practices of South Asian countries. Highly evident in South Asia are the applications of 'migration diplomacy,' coined by Adamson and Tsourapas (2019) to underline the importance of human mobility in the diplomacy of sending and receiving countries as well as those located along migration routes. The government of Sheikh Hasina, which remained in power in Bangladesh between 2014 and 2024, signed agreements for labor exports with countries ranging from Italy to Malaysia.

The presence of South Asian nationals in the Gulf is a significant dynamic in bilateral relations between the countries. For example, when rumors emerged in 1981 that hundreds of Pakistanis were 'being trained in Libya to revolt against either the Zia government or the Chadian government,' the Zia government ordered an urgent investigation into the matter and exerted considerable effort to prevent the deportation of 10,000 Pakistani workers from Libya. Not only was the deportation of Pakistani workers prevented, but the number of Pakistani workers in Libya also increased following this incident (CIA 1983b, 7-8).

The remittances transferred by Pakistanis working in the oil-rich Gulf countries to their families are one of the key reasons for Pakistan's careful approach in balancing its policies between Iran and Saudi Arabia. By avoiding direct confrontation with the Gulf countries or completely sidelining Saudi Arabia in conflicts between the Gulf countries, Pakistan seeks to ensure that its citizens in these countries are not deported. In short, the dependency induced by the presence of their workers prevents South Asian countries from speaking out against the Gulf countries.

Furthermore, despite the widespread violations of the rights of migrant workers, especially in the Gulf countries (Nagaraj, 2019; Al Jazeera,

2014), South Asian countries can hardly stand against this matter. For example, Imran Khan's pre-election promise to protect Pakistani workers who were being held in Saudi Arabian prisons and exploited in other ways could not be fulfilled in the slightest during his time in power (Rizvi, 2018). Important agenda items of today's Bangladesh-Malaysia relations include the plight of Bangladeshis in Malaysia who were deceived by intermediary companies with promises of finding jobs, granting an extension of time to Bangladeshis who missed the deadline to apply for jobs in Malaysia, and Bangladesh's demands that Malaysia take the lead in ASEAN for the safe repatriation of Rohingyas in Bangladesh to Myanmar (Alam, 2024; Parkaran, 2024).

Afghan Refugees Between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan

Human mobility significantly impacts not only South Asian countries' relations with nations outside the region but also their relations among themselves. The decision of the Pakistani government to repatriate hundreds of thousands of Afghans who have been living in the country since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan should be taken as an extension of the deteriorating Afghan-Pakistani relations since the Taliban came to power in August 2021. With the new wave of migration emerging after 2021, the number of undocumented Afghan migrants in Pakistan has reached 2.2 million. It is estimated that Iran hosts 4.5 million Afghans, including 500,000 undocumented migrants and 2.6 million individuals officially registered by Iranian authorities (UNHCR, 2023).

Pakistan's coercive diplomacy of sending Afghans back was propelled by factors such as the terrorist attacks carried out by the Pakistani Taliban TTP in the country and the Taliban's insistence on, similar to previous Afghan governments, not recognizing the Durand Line as the official border between the two countries. The sudden return of 541,000 Afghans (Al Jazeera, 2024) has cornered the Taliban government, which was already in a strained economic situation.

A similar situation is observable in Iran-Afghanistan relations. The persistent mutual suspicion in Iran-Taliban relations since the Taliban's first term in power, last summer's water-sharing dispute over the Helmand River, the terrorist attacks in Iran, and the clashes between the forces

of the two sides on the border, combined with Iran's ongoing economic difficulties, led Iran, like Pakistan, to decide to send millions of Afghans back to Afghanistan (Von Heim, 2024).

The historically difficult control and, therefore, porous nature of interstate borders in South Asia has facilitated border trade as well as allowed for human mobility. Coupled with the war environment that has persisted for more than forty years, in particular in Afghanistan, human and goods smuggling has become widespread and sophisticated (Mohammadi, Nimkar, and Savage, 2019, 6).

In Afghanistan, smuggling is nearly a generational business, passed down from father to son. Smuggling is not perceived as a shameful business in the country (Mohammadi, Nimkar, and Savage, 2019). As Aikins states, "In Afghanistan, where people had been fleeing war for two generations, everyone had a relative or friend who could put you in touch with a qachaqbar [smuggler]" (Aikins, 2022). After forty years, Afghan migrant networks have become transnational and have spread from Afghanistan to Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Western and Eastern Europe, North America, and Australia (Monsutti, 2016, 171).

In this respect, the route of irregular migration originating from Afghanistan seems to be taken over by a significant number of smugglers (Majidi and Danziger, 2016, 162). As stated in a report on Migrant Smuggling in Asia and the Pacific by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Active in a variety of roles, smugglers are involved as recruiters, transporters, accommodation providers, facilitators, enforcers, organizers, and financiers. They can adapt quickly to changing circumstances, particularly the closure of smuggling routes due to States' law enforcement responses to migrant smuggling" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). July 2018). For example, according to Aikins,

'It used to be easy for Afghans to cross the Iranian border; a small bribe for the border guards was enough. When Iran first increased border controls in the 1990s, Afghans began walking to the Zahedan border, paying \$150 to smugglers, and then crossing into Iran. The border controls increased by a 4.5m-high wall that Iran built on the border, but this was not a prevention, as migrants now went further south and began

crossing into Iran via the Pakistani province of Balochistan, where human traffickers and separatist groups were rampant. As illegal crossings continued, they became more dangerous and expensive. In other words, the wall's greatest function was not to stop illegal crossings but to leave this trade in the hands of gangs who had invested everything in this business' (Aikins, 2022, 78).

.Migration in Europe-South Asia Relations

European countries are the most significant migration destinations for the overseas populations of nine million Pakistanis, eighteen million Indians, six million Afghans, seven and a half million Bangladeshis, two million two hundred thousand Nepalese, and two million Sri Lankans. Approximately 850,000 Pakistanis live in European countries, with the vast majority residing in Northern and Southern Europe, primarily the United Kingdom; 1.9 million Indians (immigrants and citizens) reside in the United Kingdom; and 650,000 people of Bangladeshi origin live in England and another 150,000 in Italy (IOM, 2023; Azad and Vallentine, 2024; Montalvo and Batalova, 2024; Thapa, 2024). European countries are also the latest preference of Nepalese, who used to put their efforts into arriving at the Gulf region and other parts of Asia in order to find work (Raut, 2024). South Asian migrants rank among the top groups attempting to enter European countries, either through formal agreements between South Asian and European nations or via irregular means, which makes migration one of the most important agenda items in today's Europe-South Asia relations.

Since the 2015 "refugee crisis," European Union (EU) countries have been working to curb irregular migration through border controls while simultaneously seeking to repatriate illegal migrants who have reached Europe by signing readmission agreements with non-EU sending countries. This endeavor accelerated with the EU 'Migration Partnership Framework' in 2016, and, under the guise of 'voluntary return,' illegal migrants have often been sent back to their countries of citizenship or third countries with the threat of 'deportation' accompanied by partial financial support. In these agreements with countries in regions with high migrant outflow, such as the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, the EU grants signatories short-term visa convenience and certain

benefits, including programs such as vocational training to their citizens. For example, the first agreement between the European Union and Pakistan for the return of illegal migrants originated in Pakistan was signed in 2009. The European Union, as the actor with the most development aid to Afghanistan in the pre-Taliban period, signed a similar agreement with the Afghan Government in 2016. With the 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' announced by the European Commission in 2020, the EU has been signing new agreements under the 'Talent Partnerships' with countries such as Bangladesh, Tunisia, Pakistan, Egypt, and Morocco. These agreements include language and vocational training programs in these countries to attract more educated, skilled, and legal migrants in line with the labor market needs of EU member states. On the other hand, no responsible policies are being developed to address the root causes of intense migration from these countries; instead, as evidenced by the EU's financial aid agreements with countries like Tunisia and Egypt in exchange for curbing illegal migration, efforts to prevent irregular migration often come at the cost of human rights violations and cooperation with authoritarian regimes (Townsend, 2014).

Conclusion

Although Türkiye has evolved from being merely a transit country to being a destination country as well, it remains central to migration routes from South Asia to Europe. As a result, migration waves from three of this region's four most critical countries—Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan—will challenge Türkiye's security and policies. Given Afghanistan's economic struggles, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as Iran and Afghanistan, and the use of migrants as weapons, Türkiye must enhance border security before migrants reach its territory. Türkiye should exert its efforts to keep Afghanistan a priority on the international agenda, be prepared to intervene swiftly in issues like the Helmand River water dispute and foster regional economic ties between Central and South Asia to support economic stability. It should also strengthen its relations with Bangladesh, similar to its engagement with Afghanistan and Pakistan, to ease the return of irregular migrants.

Additionally, Türkiye must endeavor to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts, closely monitoring contentious issues in Taliban relations

with Iran and Pakistan as well as the triggers and indicators presented in the scenarios above. Türkiye's extensive experience in facilitating dialogue between Afghanistan and its neighbors positions it as a potential mediator in preventing future conflicts.

Furthermore, given that smuggling has historically been regarded as a 'respectable' profession in Afghanistan, convincing the Taliban government to criminalize smuggling will be crucial in the long run. Encouraging the Taliban to prioritize border security to curb irregular migration can also be essential. Even before the Taliban's takeover, when Afghanistan's administration was more receptive to external incentive and guidance, the 2008 'Law on Countering Abduction and Human Trafficking/Smuggling' was weakened by the use of the same Dari term (*ghachag-e insan*) for both human smuggling and human trafficking (Majidi and Danziger, p. 172). Therefore, persuading the Taliban to first legally define smuggling as a crime, commit to relevant international agreements, and subsequently build its border security capacity will be key to addressing irregular migration effectively.

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